

GRASVILLE ABBEY;

A ROMANCE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

“ See yonder hallow’d fane! the pious work
“ Of names once fam’d, now dubious or forgot,
“ And buried ’midst the wreck of things which were.”

THE GRAVE.

DUBLIN:

Printed for P. WOGAN, P. BYRNE, G. BURNET,
H. COLBERT, and J. RICE.

1798.



GRASVILLE ABBEY.

C H A P. I.

MORTALITY.

“—— *The grave, dread thing!*
Men shiver, when thou’rt nam’d.”

THE GRAVE.

“**T**HE blessed Virgin aid and protect thee! and when this poor frame, now worn out with infirmities, and sinking in the grave, shall, ere to morrow’s sun, rise before its Creator in an immortal state,—oh! may I then be placed over thee as a guardian angel, though invisible to my child!—Weep not, Matilda, but.”——

Such were the words delivered by madame Maserini to her daughter, as the latter held the dying hand of her mother, and in an agony of grief listened to those instructions, which she was certain would be the last she ever should receive, from a parent whose maternal tenderness and affection was the most sincere, and of which she now would severely feel the loss. Madame Maserini immediately after fell into a fainting fit, which lasted so long, that the nurse as well as Matilda thought she was no more; but in this they were mistaken; for to the joy of all her attendants she

recovered, and inquired, as she had repeatedly done before, whether her son (who was an officer) was yet arrived; they answered her in the negative; for as he had been informed several times that it was thought his mother's disorder would prove fatal, it was known he might obtain leave of absence from his regiment, which was then stationed in Flanders. But some little time before, an express had been sent to him, setting forth that madame Maserini was much worse, and they thought her life in great danger; they also mentioned that it was her particular desire to see him; he was therefore now expected every hour: but after this fit she said she should not survive that evening, and seemed extremely impatient to see her son; she said she had something of the greatest importance to communicate to him, which she refused to relate to her daughter; but still finding that he did not arrive, she asked for her confessor, when to her inexpressible surprise and grief she was informed that he was sent for, that morning, by a sick relation, ten miles off, and was not yet returned; she called for pen and ink, and though so weak as hardly able to be supported in her bed, with great pain and difficulty she wrote several lines, then dropped her pen, clasped hold of Matilda's hand, and expired.

The grief of all who were present was most poignant; but particularly that of Matilda; she now beheld herself an orphan with a very small fortune, which was not sufficient to support her genteelly without some other addition; she was bereft of a mother whose good instructions and advice she could now no longer receive; in short, she was distracted.

Not

Not many minutes after the dissolution of madame Maserini, the physician came in; he found the attendants stupefied with grief, and Matilda in the same posture as she was at the moment her mother expired; he parted her hand from that of the corpse, which she pressed to her bosom, and bathed with tears; but she had the presence of mind to take up the paper on which her mother had wrote, and when she entered her chamber, threw it carelessly in the escritoire, without once looking at the writing; in short, her mind was in such a state that for many hours she had not the least remembrance of the affair.

About half an hour after the decease of madame Maserini, Alfred her son arrived. When he first heard of his mother's illness, he would have set off for Paris directly, but was prevented by the indisposition of a superior officer. Immediately as he received the last express, he obtained leave of absence for a month, and left Flanders the day after; but, unfortunately, in one part of his journey, where he was obliged to ride on horseback, the animal took fright and threw him; he was taken up for dead; but being only stunned by the blow, he soon recovered; yet it served to detain him a few days; as soon as he was able to stand, he made the best of his way to the city, but arrived too late to receive the important secret that madame Maserini so much wished to impart to him.

Madame Maserini was the youngest daughter of a nobleman whose power and dignity were well known in all parts of France; having no son he resolved to aggrandise his name through his eldest daughter; for which purpose, he determined to place his two

youngest in a convent; and, if possible, to prevail on them to take the veil: in this case, the fortune he would have been necessitated to have given them, might be added to that of their eldest sister, which most likely would procure her a husband of great note; he could then have his name transferred to his son-in-law, and by that means the family honours would descend to posterity, the same as by male issue:—thus did the unjust marquis intend to bury from the world two amiable young women, to satisfy an empty and ridiculous ambition.

The marchioness died when the children were very young, and it was reported, through his ill treatment;—the marquis now thought it full time to put his scheme into execution; he accordingly persuaded the young ladies to be boarders for a few months, which they both readily agreed to; he accompanied them himself to the convent of N****, and affected the greatest grief at parting from them; in private he begged the lady abbess to let no opportunity pass that might hasten their desire of taking the veil.—Felicia, the youngest, seemed perfectly contented with her situation; but her sister, who was of a more lively disposition, very much disliked it; and though the greatest art was used in order to make her take to a religious life, yet it all proved ineffectual; for, at the year's end, though the former determined to comply with their wishes, yet Clementina declared her aversion to them, and proved obstinate in her opinion; she used all the arguments in her power to persuade her sister to relinquish the thoughts of making such a place a residence for life; but Felicia was so charmed with the convent and its inhabitants, that

that she constantly replied, nothing in the world should ever tempt her to leave them; she accordingly took the white veil.—Her father (who constantly received intelligence) read the news with the greatest pleasure; but it was in some measure damped by hearing that Clementina had so great a dislike to follow her example, and that she wished to be permitted to return home:—this request he resolved not to grant; as he thought time, and a little more use to the rules and orders of the place, might work an entire change in her sentiments.

It was at this period Louis XIV. ascended the throne of France; and, among others who had business to transact at court on that occasion, was a young gentleman, the son of an Italian of large fortune.—He brought with him from Italy his sister, whom, by order of his father, he was to place in the convent of N****; the day she was introduced, he had an opportunity of seeing Clementina; he was struck with her beauty, and delighted with her conversation, and afterwards had several other interviews; for by the orders of the marquis she was permitted to see any one in company with the lady abbess, or any other person whom she could depend upon; this kind of behaviour, he thought, would be more likely to win her over to their purpose, than by laying her under any restraint; her disposition being naturally good, and by far more inclined to yield to entreaty than force.—Signor Maserini often came on visits to his sister, who was placed with her ladyship, and the chosen companion and friend of Clementina:—it was at these times, when no one was present (which would often happen, the marquis's orders not being strictly attended to), that he would de-

clare his passion, which he might plainly perceive was not listened to with dislike. Clementina felt a strong partiality for him, which soon ripened into love; she told him the state of her affairs; but when he entreated her to elope with him from the convent, she always reminded him that they must expect nothing in point of fortune from the marquis.—That, he answered, would not give him the least concern; for his father, who had no other children except his sister and himself, was worth a considerable deal of money, and had often told him, provided he could meet with a wife, whose birth, virtues, and accomplishments, would bring no disgrace upon their house, that wealth would be no object to him, as he should be able to give him enough to keep them, not only in plenty, but in affluence.

Clementina's mind was on the rack which way to resolve; if she rejected the proposal, she would most likely be obliged to continue in the convent for life, and be constantly harassed with the importunities of all about her to take the veil; which would be worse than death; on the contrary, if she consented to fly with signor Maferini to Italy, she must run the hazard of travelling many miles, and when she arrived in that country, would see no one that she knew, except himself and his sister;—the thoughts of leaving Felicia, the difficulty of escaping, and the idea of what would be the consequence if they were discovered, made her shrink with horror from the thoughts of leaving her present habitation; thus she delayed coming to a resolution for near six months, when one morning, as she entered a closet belonging to the lady abbess, she perceived

ceived on the floor a letter directed to her ladyship; it was her father's seal, and was broken; she at first hesitated whether she should read it, but at length determined to see the contents, which were, "that the marquis thought the manner in which she was treated, was too mild, and begged that for the future she might be closely kept to her chamber and stricter methods had recourse to."—Ready to faint, she ran to signora Maferini, who was equally surprised at the discovery, and wished her to comply with her brother's sollicitations.—Clementina, after some little time, resolved to accept his proposals; in the afternoon he was expected, and they thought that would be a good opportunity to inform him of their determination.

C H A P. II.

SIGNOR Maferini called in the afternoon, as was expected; he only saw his sister; those methods being already put in execution which the marquis had mentioned in his letter; she informed her brother of the circumstances that had happened in the morning, and also acquainted him with Clementina's resolution to leave the convent. At these words, he was in raptures; but they were soon subdued by the thoughts of what difficulties must be surmounted to escape from it; for Clementina was totally confined to her chamber; not even signora Maferina was permitted to see her;

these orders had been given about an hour before; the young friends had therefore only time to fix, that, whatever resolutions the latter intended to put in practice, she was to write them down, and contrive to drop them in the hand of the former at evening vespers; but both the brother and the sister were at a loss how to elude the watchful vigilance of the different people belonging to the convent, till a scheme, proposed by signora, seemed as if it would prove favourable. She told her brother to go to the house of father Abfalom (a priest), who was expected that night at a late hour, to have a conference with the lady abbess, and to tell him her ladyship could not receive him; he should then procure a dress as much like father Abfalom's as possible, and, at the same time when he was to have attended, to come to the gate of the convent, through which he might pass unnoticed, if he would hold up his handkerchief so as to cover his face, which the reverend father generally did to avoid the night air; by this means, he might get to the lady abbess's apartments: but, instead of entering them, to turn short round a contrary way, that would take him to a winding staircase, which, after descending it some time, would terminate in a large vaulted chamber; and in this place he was to wait the arrival of Clementina and his sister.

"But how is it possible," returned signor Maferini, "if you should be able to meet me there, that we can escape? You will certainly be known."

"Leave that to me," said the lady. "We shall also be disguised as friars: and when you again pass the attendants accompanied by us, they will naturally suppose you have been with her

her ladyship, and are returned with two of your brethren; be sure to have a carriage at a little distance, which will by day-break convey us a few miles from these detestable walls; and by to-morrow evening we shall probably arrive at some little village, where we may, in the same dresses, remain in safety till the pursuit that will be made after us is partly over; and we shall then be able to proceed on our journey to Italy without interruption."

Signor Maferini, after having thanked his sister a thousand times for her excellent scheme, took his leave, in order to prepare for the elopement. Immediately after he was gone, the lady wrote down those particulars they had just before agreed on, and the exact manner in which Clementina was to act:—at evening vespers they met; and when the ceremony was over, she received from her friend the billet without discovery; as soon as she entered her sister's cell (which was the place where she was confined), she burst into tears. Felicia, who had not been able to attend vespers, on account of an indisposition which obliged her to keep her bed, was astonished, and begged to know, in the tenderest terms, the cause of her grief; but Clementina was unable to speak.

The convent bell had now done ringing; all was silent, except the wind, which howled through the apartments; the dim lamp that hung in Felicia's cell was obliged to be removed, as, hanging too near a casement, it was in danger of being extinguished. Clementina placed it on one side of her sister's bed, and by its light, observed in her countenance a death-like paleness; she pressed Clementina's hand to her bosom, and once more begged to

know why she wept; the latter, by degrees, and with the greatest circumspection, informed her of her intentions of leaving the convent; horror showed itself in every feature of Felicia while she listened to the relation; at length, overcome by surprise, grief, and weakness, she fainted. Water stood by: her sister, hardly able to support herself, applied it to her relief, and had the presence of mind not to make any noise. After some minutes, she recovered, but was almost too ill to speak. Clementina supported her in her bed, and received the last words of her sister with a look of anguish and madness.

“Clementina,” said Felicia, whose voice was hardly articulate, “heaven preserve you in this hazardous attempt! Oh! my sister, may you see many happy years; and while the sunshine of prosperity sheds its beams upon thee, may they never be obstructed by the chilling wind of adversity. Almighty Father!” she exclaimed, (and crossed herself with the greatest fervency) “in this my last hour of dissolution, when the soul is near parting from mortal dust, to fly unsullied to a merciful and heavenly Creator, vouchsafe to incline thine ear to my last prayer and dying supplication! preserve, O Lord! my sister, through that path of life in which it shall please thee to place her, from the temptations and snares of the wicked; and when she is under the rod of affliction, inspire her with fortitude and resignation to bear it without murmuring, that with religion and piety she may descend into the grave, and rise again an angel of purity, ready to fly into the arms of her Saviour, her Redeemer, and her God!”

Clementina

Clementina supported her as well as she was able ; she spoke no more, but survived about five minutes, and expired in her arms.

CHAP. III.

THE situation of Clementina was now dreadful beyond expression ; the distant tinkling of a clock at a remote part of the monastery proclaimed the hour was ten ; the wind, which had been so very high, had entirely dropped, and the moon, quite obstructed by heavy clouds, could not be discerned ; large drops of hail beat against the windows, and by degrees increased to a violent storm ; the most tremendous claps of thunder followed fast on each other ; flash after flash of vivid lightning darted through the shattered casements, which had no shutters ; this war of elements was by far more dreadful, it being an uncommon time of the year, the latter end of January. The body of Felicia lay still in the arms of her sister, who, totally insensible, rested her hand on the same pillow, till a violent clap of thunder, which shook the convent, roused her from this rêverie ; she started up, and at first hardly knew where she was ; but recollection soon came with redoubled force ; it wanted but one hour to the time when she was to meet her friend ; she was unable to come to a resolution in what manner to act : she took up the letter she had received from signora Maserini, and read it once more over.

She

She still considered that if she escaped, she might once more be happy; but if she remained in the convent, there was not the slightest hope that she should ever enjoy another hour of peace or comfort. She had now no one to leave, that could any way claim her regard or tenderness; the maternal love and affection of a mother she had never known; her father had not fulfilled that tender name by either assiduity or kindness; her eldest sister she hardly ever saw, as she was placed, before her remembrance, with a relation of her mother's in Germany, who took the care of her education. The old lady visited the marquis but once only, accompanied by his daughter, and then made but a short stay; yet in this little time, the lady Eleanor's behaviour to her sisters was proud and disdainful, so as not to call forth either esteem or fondness; as to friends she had none, except signora, for the marquis never suffered them to cultivate any acquaintance. Felicia would have been the only cause that could have made her leave the convent with regret; she, alas! was now no more; she had conceived a sincere friendship for signora Maserini, and her heart plainly told her, her affections were placed on her brother; she therefore thought it would be more prudent to run the hazard of eloping with two persons by whom she was certainly beloved, than remain in a place where her life would be made uncomfortable. But still she was chilled with horror at the thoughts of being discovered; and the loss of her sister greatly preyed upon her spirits.

It was now near the time when she was to repair to signora Maserini's room: she put some trinkets

trinkets of her sister's, which Felicia had given her before she took the white veil, into a small silver casket which she could place in her pocket, and among them the picture of her mother; she shed a flood of tears at the thought, that if the original had lived, how happy she might now have been; she then, according to the directions in the letter, wrote with her pencil feigned memorandums relative to their escape, and the names of several roads quite contrary to those they meant to take; and dropped this book in the place where it was most likely to be found.

Eleven o'clock now struck, and the hail had in some measure abated, though the thunder and lightning still continued, when Clementina took a last farewell of her departed sister; she embraced the corpse, wept over it, and was for some time unable to move, till she at last tore herself away from the body, and with her eyes swimming in tears, implored the author of all events to support her in the few critical hours she must undergo. With a trembling hand she then unbarred the door, which opened into a long gallery, on each side of which were different cells; she could not take the lamp, for fear of the light glancing into any of the apartments; and was therefore only guided by each flash of lightning that came through a large window at the further end. So weak, as hardly able to walk, she at length arrived at the casement, and sat down on a seat under it to recover her strength. The way she had already come was by far the most dangerous on account of discovery, there being one or more inhabitants in each of the rooms she had passed; she now went through several passages that led to a large vaulted chamber, and from thence
began

began to ascend a stone stair-case that wound round the south tower of the convent, and took her entirely away from the cells below belonging to the nuns, to the sleeping rooms of the boarders above. The thunder in this place had a most awful sound: the lightning, though it could only enter a small painted casement which stood at a great height, yet served to show the gloomy horrors of the place.

She was already half-way up; but terrified at the thoughts of her situation, she rested for a few moments against the old iron railing, when a light step seemed to move on the same stair. Almost convulsed with horror, she shrunk back, and was fortunately unable to call out, when at the same moment a strong flash of lightning darted from the window above, and showed her the figure of a man; the sight of it was but momentary, and all again was silent and dark; with breathless agitation and considerable quickness, she ran up the other part of the stair-case, flew across two passages, and arrived at the chamber of signora Maserini; she gave the signal they had fixed on, and the door was carefully opened by her friend, who with astonishment received Clementina, fainting in her arms.

She soon recovered, and informed signora of the death of her sister, and also of the event that had so much alarmed her; the former intelligence she was surprised and grieved at; but the latter, concerning the person on the stairs, she told her was her brother, who was to wait in the chamber below; this circumstance signora had neglected to mention in the letter, which might have been the cause of discovery; she insisted on Clementina's taking a glass of wine, and helped her to dress in the apparel of
a priest,

a priest, and then made herself ready in another disguise of the same kind.

She now thought it full time to attend her brother, and begging Clementina to support herself through this great trial, she softly opened the door; they proceeded to the stair-case, and descended it. It was quite dark, the thunder and lightning being over.—When they had got to the bottom, signora, in a whisper, called her brother, who instantly answered; he was going to congratulate them on having got so far without discovery: but his sister stopped him. “This,” said she, “is not a place for compliments.”—They all three then re-ascended the stair-case, passed through a long passage, and arrived at the door of the lady abbess’s apartments; they stopped there about two minutes, and then holding their handkerchiefs partly over their faces, they crossed a large hall, and arrived at the door at the further end;—they here passed two persons, who made no inquiries. This door led them to an inner court, and from that to an outer one, in which there were several porters; but they, supposing them to have returned from a conference with her ladyship, asked no questions. They had now only to pass the outside gates, which they did in the same manner, without any obstructions, and saw themselves totally free from the convent.

Signora and her brother were overjoyed at their good fortune; but Clementina, though she was happy in having escaped, yet sorrow still hung upon her brow; they walked about half a mile, and then entered the chaise that waited for them; signor Maserini’s servant was on horse-back; they desired the post-boy, whom they were obliged to acquaint with the whole

whole affair, to drive as fast as possible, and he might depend on being rewarded. Signora acquainted her brother (who had very tenderly inquired after Clementina's health, and the cause of her melancholy) of Felicia's death, and begged him not to force her to talk; that her spirits, which within a few hours had been so greatly shocked, might again be a little composed.

This observation was just:—Clementina had in a little time gone through a great deal of trouble: the surprise and concern which followed the finding of her father's letter, the grief she felt at those orders being so soon put in execution, the terror and anxiety she was under when she read signora's billet, the sudden shock of her sister's death, the horror she felt during the storm, with the alarm she received on the stair-case, and her dread of being discovered the whole night, conspired to overwhelm her with sensations almost equal to madness; her looks plainly confirmed that she was exceedingly ill, and it did not escape signora or her brother. He was almost distracted to know in what manner to act. To wait for advice, would be equally as bad as to discover themselves; yet to see her in such a state without any aid, was distressing beyond expression. He could not persuade her to take any nourishment, though he had provisions in the chaise to prevent their stopping on the road for any thing else than to change horses. Signora was extremely sorry to see her friend so much indisposed; she perceived a fever was coming on; she therefore advised her brother, about three o'clock in the afternoon, to order the post-boy to turn out of the high road, and drive into a wild part of the country, which though
it

it might take them out of the way they intended to go, yet in such a place they might find some retired cottage where they could stop for some time in safety; for she was very certain Clementina would not be able to proceed on the journey.

Her brother consented, and ordered the boy accordingly, who turned into another road, which led them to a wild heath, and from that to a remote solitary forest. They continued in one track for some miles, till it began to grow dark, when they descended into a deep valley, at the bottom of which was a cottage that stood by itself. The chaise then stopped, and signor Maserini and his sister alighted; they were obliged to help Clementina carefully out, who, supported by each of their arms, walked up to the retired dwelling, which seemed to be the residence of virtue, contentment, and happiness.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

ADVERSITY.

*“ Daughter of Jove, relentless pow’r,
Thou tamer of the human breast,
Whose iron scourge, and tott’ring hour,
The bad affright, afflict the best!
Bound in thy adamantine chain,
The proud are taught to taste of pain,
And purple tyrants vainly groan,
With pangs unfelt before, unpitied and alone.”*

GRAY.

“ **W**HO would not relinquish the gaudy pomp and splendour of a court, the costly robe, the sumptuous feast, the deceitful courtier, and all the pride of empty greatness, to spend their few remaining days in such a cot as this? The happy pair, blessed with each other’s love, whose health and strength permit them to earn their daily bread, and care for no one, might here enjoy repose, and, with comfort to themselves and others, breathe out a life of piety and virtue.” Such were the thoughts of signor Maserini, as he aided to support Clementina to the door of the cottage; he knocked, and it was opened by a young man who seemed not yet to have attained his twentieth year.

“ Friend,” said the disguised priest, “ admit under your hospitable roof three travellers, who for one night beg a lodging, and will repay you to the utmost of their power, with gratitude and prayers.”

The

The young shepherd—for such his dress denoted him to be—courteously invited them into a small clean room, where, on one side of the fire, sat a man and woman seemingly much advanced in years, and on the other a beautiful young girl, who looked to be about eighteen; they rose, and seemed greatly surprised at the entrance of the priests: the old man instantly ordered supper for his reverend guests, after assuring them they were sincerely welcome.

Signora Maserini placed Clementina next to her, while her brother went to the post-boy, whom he liberally rewarded, told him to make the best of his way home, and acquaint his master he had been with only one gentleman, quite a different road from that they had travelled; he then re-entered the cottage with Edward; whose horse they turned loose in a field behind it. Clementina, since he had been out, had fainted, and was just recovering.

Amazement might be seen in each face of the cottagers; that three priests should ride in a chaise attended by a servant, was strange, as such sort of people usually walked; the effeminate beauty of two of them was remarkable; and then one of them fainting, was astonishing. Signora thought it would be better to inform them of their situation at once, and trust to their generosity in concealing them; she therefore gave her brother the hint, and called on one side the old woman, whom she acquainted with the whole affair; while he did the same to the man; they both greatly wondered in what manner they could escape, but readily promised their protection.

Clementina all this time seemed totally insensible of what was going forward, and, in short, was in a state of stupidity; for she hardly gave
any

any answer to those questions that were put to her, nor could they persuade her to take any nourishment ; she was therefore undressed and put into a warm bed ; neither the brother nor the sister could partake of the homely fare that was set before them ; but about eight o'clock signor Maserini left the cottage with the young shepherd and Edward, and walked to a small cot, that belonged to the father of the former, who was acquainted by his son with the history of the gentleman he had brought. There was one bed to spare, which signor Maserini took possession of, and Edward slept with Cyril, which was the young man's name.

La Faril, the old cottager, insisted on his daughter Sabina sitting up with Clementina, and begged signora to retire to rest, as he was sure the fatigue she must have undergone must make sleep very necessary ; she took his advice, and lay down in a small room next to Clementina's. Both La Faril and his wife gave Sabina charge to be very careful of the young lady, and then they themselves bowed under the influence of the drowsy god.

Signor Maserini was at the cottage early the next morning ; he eagerly inquired after Clementina's health, and was informed by Sabina, that she was very ill, and had been delirious the greater part of the night ; she was now asleep, but was so disturbed, she feared it would not refresh her ; neither his sister nor her mother was yet up, and her father was gone out.—He had not changed his dress, but was still in the disguise of a priest. He asked Sabina, whether there was any medical man lived near ; she said there was one about three miles off, who always attended their family ; he asked her for a direction, which she gave him ;
and

and not considering the hazard he ran, he resolved to go to him.

It was hardly light when he set off: he had not got above a mile, when he was accosted by a man who was crossing the same field.

"Father," said he, "there is sad news."

"What my son?" replied signor Maserini.

"Why," returned he, "there are two young ladies gone off with a young man, who they say, is brother to one of them, from the convent of N****; and the other, who is daughter to some marquis, has poisoned her sister, for she was found dead in the morning."

He then continued to give an account how it was supposed they had escaped; and a man, whose chaise was hired the same night, had some thoughts it went a different road from that the post-boy had informed him; for, upon inquiry, no such carriage had been seen in the places through which he said he had passed. He concluded with saying, he supposed the strictest search would be made after them, and that he heard the news from a friend who had travelled post all night, and arrived at his cottage about six that morning.

It happened well that the man was so pleased with his own discourse, as not to take much notice of his hearer; for it would not have required a very acute observer to have seen his countenance change several times; he wished much to return back directly; but then his companion would certainly remark it; he therefore thought it best to continue walking till he could part with him without being noticed. Fortunately, an opportunity offered about half a mile further, when the man turned short into a lane, and wished him a good morning. He ran back as fast as possible, and found breakfast quite

quite ready ; he told them the cause of his precipitate return ; and they all allowed it was not unlikely but the cottage might be searched ; but their perplexity and horror was still increased, when he informed them of the suspicions that had fallen on Clementina, concerning Felicia's death ; but they all agreed by no means to inform her of any part of the adventure.

There was now the greatest necessity for them to be concealed ; for as there were no witnesses to contradict an affair which by appearances seemed probable, he was distracted to think, that if they were taken, Clementina might suffer the punishment of a murderer : and in such cases strict inquiries and search were made through France. In what manner to act, they knew not ; Clementina was too ill to travel ; and if she could, there was not a doubt but they would be overtaken ; the officers might be there in three or four hours' time ; and La Faril would run a great risk in concealing them. Edward had no change of dress ; he arrived at the cottage a little while after his master in the morning ; Cyril, the young shepherd, who, they found, was to marry Sabina, had set off early with his father on a short journey, and would not return till night. Both of them had promised secrecy, and begged signor Maferini and his servant would sleep there as long as he thought proper. None of them could think of any scheme to prevent discovery, till Sabina said,

“ Father, is there not at the bottom of the garden a cave which none knows of besides ourselves ? ”

La Faril instantly turned pale, and answered, “ Yes, my dear : but it will, I am afraid, be too damp for the sick lady. ”

“ Is

“Is it not possible,” said signor Maserini, “to have it warmed by fires?”

They all agreed it would.

“Then, for heaven’s sake, my friend,” answered her brother, “let us begin about it directly.”

All hands were set to work; Edward made a fire in it immediately, and conveyed feather-beds, provisions, chairs, a table, candles, a lamp, oil, tinder-boxes, matches, and every other utensil that could any way make it comfortable. The cave extended a great way back under some hills which rose at the bottom of La Faril’s garden; the entrance was entirely hidden from the eye by thick moss and shrubs which grew round the bottom of the eminence;—it seemed to have been a retreat at the time Henry the Fifth conquered France.—The present possessor, who by chance discovered it, had never disclosed the secret to any but his own family; for a son of La Faril’s, who turned out exceedingly wild, but was since dead, committed a robbery about ten miles from the cottage, and for fear of being taken, begged his father to conceal him in the cave, which was accordingly done; and the officers of justice, though they searched every part of the house and garden, did not perceive the entrance of it. It was at the recollection of this circumstance that La Faril turned pale when Sabina mentioned the cave; for it was very necessary they should keep the knowledge of it in their own bosoms, as he would be punished, if it was known, for screening his own son from the rigour of the law.

About two o’clock in the afternoon, every thing was ready: but though great fires had been kept in it ever since ten in the morning,

it

it was yet damp; they therefore thought it best not to enter that night, but early the next day; and then signor Maserini could instruct Cyril and his father in what manner to act.—Edward was placed at a window on the top of the cottage, with a glass, so that he could perceive any one coming that way within a mile; and that notice would be time enough for them to make their escape to the garden: he was also to sit up all night in the cave to keep in a large fire, that it might be thoroughly aired by the morning.

Clementina was better, and perfectly sensible and composed;—signora ventured to inform her of the affair relative to her brother's meeting the man in the morning, carefully concealing that part concerning the death of her sister. She was not so much alarmed as might have been expected, and seemed extremely happy in the contrivance of the cave. Since the sleep she had in the morning, though it was much disturbed, she had mended, and was now able to sit up for an hour to have her bed made. She ate a little supper; and in short, through the good attendance and management of her hostess, Clementina seemed perfectly recovered from those dangerous symptoms of a fever which appeared the night before.

At nine o'clock, signor Maserini took his leave, and walked to the cottage of Cyril and his father; he informed them of the whole affair concerning the cave, by permission of La Faril, who knew them to be too much his friends, to discover it.—Signor Maserini begged both of them, if any inquiry should be made after him, to declare they knew nothing of him; he conjured them to lay the same injunctions on a young girl who was a distant relation

to

them, and kept their house ; all which they promised faithfully to perform. The place was so exceedingly retired, that none of them had been seen, except by La Faril, his wife, and daughter, Cyril, his father, the young girl, and the man before mentioned ; nor was any stranger observed in that part, sometimes for three months together ; and the only way they had of procuring provision, was by going to a small town four miles distant. Signor Maferini thanked both the father and son for their hospitality towards him, and after wishing them a good night, retired to his bed.

CHAP. V.

THE dejected lover had now time to recollect his situation ; though his father was exceedingly fond of him, yet there was a haughty pride and obstinacy in his disposition, that made him tremble lest he should disapprove of his proceedings : it was true, he had several times told him that, with respect to his marrying, he should consider wealth as no object ; but used always to lay a particular stress on his consent being first obtained ; this last circumstance he had never mentioned to Clementina :—he also knew him to be whimsical and capricious, in-somuch that it would not be unlikely, should they ever be so fortunate as to arrive in Italy, but he might refuse his consent to their nuptials, though not capable of alleging any reason for his dislike. He therefore determined to persuad

Clementina to be married to him before they made themselves known to his father, whom they could easily deceive by telling him the ceremony had not been performed ; if he approved of her as his daughter, it was all very well ; if, on the contrary, he rejected her, it would be out of his power to part them, as she would be his by the most sacred ties on earth ; for, should the worst happen, and his father totally discard him,—at the death of a brother of his late mother's, no one could prevent his taking possession of a very good fortune : and, till that period, which was not likely to be long, his uncle being a man much advanced in years, he could support himself and wife, by industry and application to his pencil, which art he was a proficient in, though he only learnt it as an accomplishment. But still the thoughts of their being discovered again intruded on his mind, and he shrunk with horror from the idea that Clementina might suffer an ignominious death :—sleep refused its aid, and the rest of the night was spent in melancholy reflections on the dangers they had passed, and disagreeable conjectures on those that might still be to come :—he rose about six, more fatigued than when he retired to rest, and took the advantage of the darkness of the morning, to walk to the cottage ; he found them all up, as they had determined to enter the cave before day-light. Clementina was considerably better ; signora Maserini was in good spirits, but they were damped by seeing her brother look so ill :—she, however, concealed her uneasiness, for fear of alarming Clementina, who had also taken notice of it.

After a hasty breakfast, they thought it full time to proceed to the garden ; it was a disagreeable

greeable morning, though not so cold as night have been expected for the time of year; yet, there was a chilling dampness in the air, which made it far more uncomfortable than a severe frost; and a few small stars, scattered about the heavens, gave the heavy black clouds which encompassed a large space, a more dreary appearance.—It was just beginning to grow light, when the melancholy party came out from the cottage. La Faril went first: his thoughts were fixed on the similarity of the present scene with that when he conducted his only son to the same gloomy habitation.

The recollection of this circumstance drew a tear from his aged eye: for the good old man could not help paying that tribute to his memory, though he had shed many on account of his vices and extravagancies. Signor Maferini walked after him; he was wholly taken up with the idea of their being discovered; and when he looked on Clementina, who rested on one arm while his sister laid hold on the other, he almost cursed himself for leading her into so much danger.

Clementina was distressed to see him look so ill, but feared nothing while she was under his protection.—Signora had no misfortunes of her own; to see them happy, she thought would make her so; and therefore her anxiety or happiness was heightened or decreased according to the situation of her brother and her friend.—Sabina and her mother followed, with their hands and eyes lifted towards heaven, imploring blessings on their visitors, and praying that they might remain undiscovered.

When they arrived at the cave, La Faril touched the secret spring, and the door flew
C 2 open;

open ;—they were received by Edward, who had, as he was ordered, kept good fires all night, so that the place felt perfectly warm ; their conductor then told them that Sabina should come every night after it was dark, to inform them if any thing particular happened, and to be useful in any way that might serve to make them comfortable—signor Maserini returned him a thousand thanks for his kindness and friendship.—La Faril and his family then took their leave, and the door closed after them.

The cave, as was before mentioned, ran a great way back ;—it was divided into three regular apartments, which, though narrow, were each of them long :—the first they made their sitting room ; in the second signor Maserini slept ; and in the third, Clementina and his sister.—Edward had a small bed placed for him close to the entrance, that he might be ready to give an alarm if he heard any noise that seemed to threaten danger.—They received no light but from candles or lamps :—this, added to the antique manner in which it was fitted up, and the hollow echo that sent back every sound they uttered, gave the place a gloomy and melancholy appearance ;—but, disagreeable as it might seem, it was to them a comfortable retreat ;—it might preserve them from their enemies ; and with that hope, any situation would be acceptable, though, if possible, ten times more disgusting than that they now possessed.

Sabina arrived at the cave about ten o'clock at night, attended by Cyril ;—they informed signor Maserini that no inquiries had been made after them that day ; but they had heard the king's officers were within a few miles of the place ; and there was not a doubt but they would

would remain there until the next morning. The young lovers stopped about an hour, and then took their leave.

C H A P. VI.

IT was near twelve o'clock when signor Maserini, who had been reading to Clementina and his sister ever since the departure of Cyril and Sabina, declared he was fatigued, and proposed going to rest; they both readily consented, and had retired to their chamber about a quarter of an hour, when Edward ran into his master's room, with the news that the officers were certainly arrived, for he had heard them talking close to the cave.

Fortunately, he did not speak loud; and signor Maserini, who was just beginning to undress, desired him not to disturb the ladies, and he himself would come to the door and listen to their conversation.—They both proceeded to the mouth of the cave; the wind was high, and the noise which it occasioned among the trees, prevented them from hearing but now and then a few words.—The first person whose voice they could distinguish, was Cyril.—Signor Maserini was very glad he was there;—he seemed to be talking to one of the officers—

“You see,” said he, “there are no signs of a place where we could conceal any one, even if we had ever such an inclination.”

“ Hold—not so fast, young man,” answered a stern voice :—“ we shall search particularly this place ; for I remember some years back, being here on the same errand, after a young thief, who, though he was seen to enter this cottage, yet could not be found ;—he was, I believe, that old man’s son.”

“ Ah !” exclaimed La Faril,—“ call him not by that name ; he is now no more ; and those epithets are ill bestowed on one who has long since been in his grave, and is by this time partly turned to earth again.”—Here the old man burst into tears, and, as they supposed, retired to the house ; for they heard him no more.

The officers stopped about half an hour, during which time Cyril remained with them.—Signor Maserini wondered at his having stopped so late, but looked on it as a fortunate circumstance, as La Faril was too weak and infirm to attend them in a proper manner.—He was exceedingly glad to think that neither his sister nor Clementina had known any thing of the matter, and pleased himself with the thoughts how happy they would be, when he informed them the affair they most dreaded was now over ; nor were his conjectures wrong ; for his intelligence gave them the greatest pleasure.

The following night, Sabina arrived at the cave ;—she told them that when Cyril and herself entered the cottage from seeing them the night before, the father of the former had called to tell them the officers were within two miles of them ; he had heard it at a place where he had been in the afternoon ; they therefore thought it would be best for Cyril to stay all night, in case they should come at a late

late hour to surprise them. It was fortunate they took that precaution; for about midnight they were knocked up by the unwelcome visitors.—Cyril let them in; and after their coming from the garden, they stopped about a quarter of an hour, and then departed.

Their only fear was now to fix in what manner they should proceed to Italy without discovery; but at all events they determined to remain in the cave, at least a month, that the affair might be in some measure forgotten; and they could then consult what disguise would be the most proper for them to travel in. They had resided in their habitation near a fortnight before La Faril dared to make them a visit; but receiving intelligence that the officers were certainly returned, he took the first opportunity to see them, and proposed they should travel to Italy in the disguise of Savoyards, as he had dresses which would fit them, and every thing proper for that character; they having been made for a masquerade.—His scheme met with the greatest approbation, and they accordingly set about carrying it into execution.

In about three weeks every thing was prepared, and the morning fixed when they were once more to venture forth in search of happiness.—Sabina and her mother attended them very early, in order to assist in putting on the dresses.—La Faril arrived soon after; and at six o'clock they thought it full time to set off, as it would be necessary they should get some distance from the cottage before day-light.—La Faril made signor Maserini perfectly acquainted with the way across the country: and, in case any questions were asked them by the villagers, they were to reply they were going to Italy, the place where such sort of

C 4

people

people mostly reside.—Cyril also attended to take his leave.—The spring of the cave was turned, and they once more breathed in open air;—yet the thoughts of leaving the place which had preserved them from their enemies, created a pang in their breasts, and particularly since they knew not how soon they might once more wish to be confined within its close recess. Signor Maserini clasped La Faril's hand, and hammered out his gratitude, accompanied with tears, while the good old man, whose silver hairs and aged form denoted those pearly drops which hung upon his withered cheek were not the first soft emblems of his feeling heart, pressed him to his bosom;—then, almost overcome with weakness and the effect of years, he nearly sunk insensible on the earth. This was too much for signor Maserini;—he pressed his sister and Clementina to hasten their departure, and hurried away from the spot to which he before seemed rooted.

It was an exceedingly cold morning, and the twinkling bright stars which illumined the heavens, plainly showed it to be a severe frost.—They got three miles from the cave before day-light, and continued travelling without any disagreeable circumstance happening on the road, except the curiosity of the peasants, whose homely entertainment and good nature made ample amends for their ignorance.

After some days, they had the pleasure to enter Italy.—Signor Maserini hired lodgings some miles from his father's residence, and entreated Clementina to become his, before he made himself known to him.—She was very unwilling to consent; but at last, overcome by the persuasions of the brother and the sister, he had the rapture to receive her as his own,
about

about a fortnight after their arrival.—The only difficulty that now remained was to make it known to his father, which he determined to do in about three or four days after their marriage, but first wrote to La Faril.—In the letter he inclosed a considerable present, and sent it by a friend who was going that way, as he was certain every method would be taken to intercept any letters directed to him, as La Faril lay under the greatest suspicion in point of concealing his son, as well as signor Maferini.

The day arrived on which he was to pay a visit to his father ;—he begged his sister to stay with Clementina, as she would be in want of company, and was a stranger to the place.—He set off early in the morning, and after some hours' quick travelling, during which time his ideas were entirely taken up in thinking of his father, and in what manner he should be received, he arrived at the large heavy gates of the abbey.—With a trembling hand he pulled the bell, but could not hear it ring.—After another attempt, he found the wire was rusty ; yet it made a noise. A thought struck him, which chilled him with horror—his father might be dead !—for he made himself known to no one since his coming to Italy, but his friend who carried the letter to La Faril ; and he could give no intelligence concerning his friends, as he arrived the same night as signor Maferini, from Spain, was taken ill, and did not go out till he proceeded on his journey to England, when he promised to leave the letter as he went through France.

C H A P. VII.

THIS idea had not crossed his mind five minutes, before a man and a boy approached him:—he asked them if they could tell the reason why that abbey was uninhabited?

“Heaven bless you, master!” said the man:—“you must surely be a stranger in this part, if you have not heard of the old gentleman’s death who lived here.”

Signor Maserini turned pale;—the bridle dropped from his hand, and he must have fallen upon the ground, had he not been received in the arms of the villager.

“You are not well, sir,” said the man, as he placed him on a seat under the large heavy portico of the abbey.—“Lubin, run and get the gentleman some water from yonder spring.”

The boy obeyed, and brought some in a pitcher which he had in his hand; he was persuaded to drink a small quantity, and soon recovered.—He informed the peasant he was a distant relation of the late count, and was come upon a visit to the abbey:—that the hearing so suddenly of his death had quite overcome him.

“Ah, your honour,” replied the man,—“there has been strange doings for these last six months; heaven knows best;—but one cannot be hanged for thinking, as the saying is.”

“Strange doings! for heaven’s sake, explain yourself, friend,” said signor Maserini:—“for I have the greatest reason to be interested in the affairs of the count.”

“If

“ If you will step with me to my cot, signor, I will relate to you the circumstances that have happened.—My wife expects me home to dinner, as I must return, in less than an hour, to my labour in yonder vineyard.”

He readily assented;—and having walked a small distance, they arrived at his habitation.—The horse was turned into a field.—When they entered the cottage, a neat middle-aged woman was preparing dinner: they wished much their guest would partake of their homely fare; but he could not eat.—They had not resided in that part above six months, therefore knew nothing of signor Maferini’s person:—he conjured the man to begin his narration; and the honest husbandman complied, as follows——

“ You, no doubt, signor, were acquainted with young Percival Maferini, and his sister Sifera, the only children of the late count; twelve months have not yet passed, since they both took leave of their father at that very abbey, and travelled into France, on account of some business which required Percival’s attendance at court, as Louis XIV. had just then ascended the throne. Sifera was to be placed in the convent of N****, while her brother staid, which they supposed would not be above four months; and then they were to return together:—the count for some time received letters from them both: but though the business which caused their journey was finished at the expiration of the four months, they did not by any means seem inclined to return to Italy; and in a little while after, their correspondence dropped;—for though letters were continually sent to them, no answers were received.

“ This

" This gave the count great alarm, and he wrote to a principal person near the place, concerning them: in a little time he received information that his son had run away with a young lady from the convent of N****, where he had placed his sister; that she also had eloped with them, as well as the servant who stopped with Percival in France:—he concluded with saying, the strictest search was making after them, as it was supposed the young lady had poisoned her sister, who was placed in the convent with her, had taken the white veil, and was found dead in her bed, the morning after their departure.

" This news, signor, was like a thunder-bolt to the old count:—he had not a doubt but they would be taken. From that day he drooped, and in about a week after was laid up with a violent fever. Count D'Ollifont, his nephew, was sent for."—Here Percival trembled: he knew D'Ollifont to be his enemy. The man continued—" He attended his uncle with the greatest tenderness, insomuch that he recovered enough to sit up for a few hours every day, and dispatched him to find some intelligence of his children: he accordingly set off for France, but returned at the end of the second day, with a letter which he acquainted his uncle was given him on the road by a messenger, sent from France for that purpose; it came from a friend of his who resided there, and acquainted him that both signor and signora Maserini were no more; that the former had fallen in a duel with an officer of the guards, who was going to secure them; and that the latter was seized with a violent grief, which turned her brain, and she had found means to poison herself, unknown to those who had

had the care of her : that lady Clementina was placed in the Bastille, till it was settled what punishment she should suffer ; but that she was not married to signor Maserini. This news caused a relapse in the old gentleman's disorder. Nor was it he alone who suffered :—every domestic of his household, signor, shed tears for the loss of two amiable children, who were never known to give a tender parent one pang of sorrow, except in this circumstance, and that cost them their lives.”

“ Would it had !” repeated signor Maserini to himself.—“ That ever I should have lived to have seen this day !”

The woman was too much employed in cooking her husband's dinner, and the husband too much taken up in eating it, and telling the story, to take any particular notice of him ; or else the inward workings of his soul might easily have been observed. The man continued—

“ The old count now grew considerably worse ; his physicians gave him over, and in about a week after his relapse, he died of a broken heart. When he heard of the death of his children, he altered his will ; the servants were all left mourning, and a genteel legacy ; old Abfalom, a comfortable allowance for life ; his tenants a twelve month's rent ; except which, and a few other legacies, he bequeathed the whole of his fortune to count D'Ollifont :—among the estates is Grasville Abbey, which has been shut up ever since the death of count Maserini ; nor has any of the furniture been removed—

“ How happened that, my friend ?”

“ I know not, your honour ; but folks say strange things ;—that there has been foul play,
and

and that the place is haunted by the father and his children; but it is known for certain, that count D'Ollifont intended to sleep there the night of his uncle's funeral, but could not rest: he started up about midnight, left the place with his servants directly, and the next week returned to Spain, where he was sent for at the time his uncle was taken ill."

Signor Maserini inquired if he himself had ever seen any thing at the abbey to confirm the reports of its being haunted, and how he came to be so particularly acquainted with those affairs relative to its late inhabitants.

"Why, by old Absalom the steward, signor," answered the man.—"He lived just by here, but did not long survive his old master; and as to seeing any thing, as your honour talks of, I cannot say I ever did; but Dorothy once said she saw a light one night pass several of the casements in the west tower; this Dorothy declared she could take her oath of."

"Is there any way to get to the inside of the abbey?"

"None, signor; each of the gates is well locked, barred, and bolted; and the windows are all fastened."

After some further conversation, the man's dinner-time was expired. Signor Maserini rewarded him for his trouble, and then with a heavy heart mounted his horse and departed.

CHAP. VIII.

"Expectation stood in horror."

MILTON.

WHEN the iron rod of adversity falls suddenly upon us, and misfortunes of the most distressing nature unexpectedly darken our future prospects, surprise for a little time gets the better of our feelings; amazement and horror gains such an ascendancy over our intellects, that, in the relation of our griefs, we forget for some time the nature and cause of them, while we listen with attention to the frivolous story of the circumstances by which they were occasioned.

Signor Maserini was in this state, while the husbandman related to him the account of his father, and the villany of count D'Ollifont. His astonishment was so great, that the death of the former, and the total loss of his fortune, were entirely forgotten, and he thought only on the falsehood his cousin had propagated. He left the cottage; his horse took his own course for some time; nor did he perceive he was entering by degrees into a thick wood; till some trees obstructed his way; he leaped from his horse, and threw himself on the ground; the thoughts of his situation now flashed on his memory, and the loss of his father he regretted with the most sincere grief. The imposition which had been put in practice to deprive him and his sister of their fortunes, excited both his surprise and anger; in short, the

the different emotions he felt, almost drove him to a state of distraction.

In this situation he remained for near two hours, till, harrassed through distress and fatigue, he fell into a slumber.—horrid dreams disturbed him, and his sleep was both uneasy and disagreeable; yet he remained in this state of forgetfulness till it was nearly dark:—he started up and mounted his horse, which had not moved from his side; he remembered he had promised Clementina and his sister to be at home early in the evening: but that would now be impossible, as the wood was intricate, nor was he acquainted with the way out:—he wandered about in search of the right path for near two hours, but was unsuccessful, till chance led him to the direct track:—he followed it, and in a little time found himself clear of the labyrinth.—He was very ill, and hardly able to ride; the cold had seized him by being so long in the open air; he, however, continued a good pace till he once more found himself before the gates of Grasville Abbey.

The night was very dark, the thunder rolled at a distance, and faint flashes of lightning followed one after another with considerable quickness; he stopped once more to look at the place where he had spent so many happy juvenile hours, and where he had that day hoped to have been received with cordiality and tenderness.—He had experienced the reverse; he had found his father was no more, and that he had been duped out of his right by one who was allied to him by the ties of blood, and, as he had supposed, by those of friendship.

A tear

A tear fell from his eye while he looked on the venerable structure, every part of which seemed deserted; a gloomy stillness reigned through the heavy pile, nor was the solemn silence broke but by the bird of night, which had taken up its habitation under one part of the portico.—The idea of the place being haunted now entered his imagination.

“Would to heaven,” said he, “the report I have heard was true, that I might be permitted to converse, nay only to see the spirit of my fire!” surely he would——”

Here he was interrupted by a strong flash of lightning, which darted right on his face, and was followed by a loud clap of thunder. Though he was struck silent his eye was still fixed on the abbey; the noise of the thunder had not died away above three minutes, before a violent crash was heard at the other part of the building: it seemed like the falling of armour, and continued for some little time.

Signor Maserini was struck with astonishment; horror and expectation seized him at the same moment;—he turned his horse round, and rode to the side whence the noise seemed to proceed; all again was silent, yet he still continued looking on the place.—It was by the west tower,—he recollected the account he had heard of the light being seen there. At the moment he was thinking on this circumstance, a faint glimmering passed a small casement in the very part of the west tower the woman had described; his situation may be more easily imagined than described; he was a perfect statue with astonishment; still he thought it might be fancy;—but he was thoroughly convinced, when a stronger light appeared in the same place a few minutes afterwards, but disappeared

appeared in an instant:—every nerve was stiffened with horror; he still drew nearer that part of the abbey:—five minutes had not elapsed before the light again appeared in the same place; he now plainly perceived a figure pass, bearing a lamp; it vanished as quick as the former light had done; and all again was silent and dark.

His passions were now wrought up to the highest pitch; he galloped round to the front gates, alighted, and in vain attempted to enter the abbey;—every entrance was strongly fastened; his brain was disordered, and he still continued to force the doors; but, after a long time, finding his exertions all in vain, he again mounted his horse, and rode as fast as possible towards his own home.

CHAP. IX.

SIGNORA Maferini waited with impatience the return of her brother;—she wished much to hear of her father's health, and in what manner he received the account of Clementina:—nor was Clementina less anxious; her spirits were depressed, she trembled for fear of ill news, yet the vivacity of her sister-in-law supported her tolerably well through the day. Night approached, and the time when signor Maferini promised to be at home was expired:—his father might have detained him, several circumstances might have happened to make him

him later. With these thoughts they in some measure satisfied themselves till it grew late; they were then exceedingly unhappy at not seeing him:—the roads he had to come were often infested by banditti.

A little while after mid-night, a loud rap was heard at the door:—Edward flew to open it; neither Sisera nor Clementina could ask who it was, before signor Maferini stood before them:—his appearance for a moment struck them motionless with surprise; nor was it to be wondered at—the disorder of his dress, and the wildness which darted from his eyes, made his figure altogether horrible.

How does my father?" asked his sister.

"Well," he exclaimed; "but if you wish to know, Sisera, ask the angels in heaven: they best can tell thee."

"Alas!" she cried, and burst into tears: "my father is no more: I know it by thy looks,—by the strange answers you give to my questions."

"You are right," said he: "our father has paid the debt of nature."

He seemed now rather more composed; yet complained of violent pains in his head and limbs. Signora Maferini grieved much for the loss of her father:—she could get no further intelligence from her brother's discourse, which was very incoherent and difficult to be understood, but that her father was no more, and that they were duped out of their right; but by whom, and in what manner, she could not possibly find out. He talked much of an appearance he had seen in the abbey; but they looked upon it as the effect of a disordered brain.

The

The morning found them still more distressed. Signor Maserini was in a high fever, and quite delirious, his sister almost distracted, and Clementina very little better; the former immediately sent for a physician who lived near, and had always attended their family:—she hoped from him to receive some intelligence concerning her father's affairs, which the situation of her brother prevented him from communicating. Edward was dispatched, and in a little time returned with the gentleman they so much wished to see.

He was a character universally admired in Italy; his abilities were equally exerted in behalf of the poor, and those in a higher sphere of life; he was a friend to the indigent and distressed of every class; yet looked upon with admiration and respect by all who were so happy as to be known by him. Such was the man who, with all the marks of astonishment and surprise in his countenance, was conducted by Edward to signora Maserini:—he informed her that it was supposed by all who knew them, that both her and her brother had been dead some time; he also confirmed the news of her father's death; she would not, however, detain him to relate to her how such a report had been spread, till he had first seen her brother:—he had some knowledge of the physician; yet every answer he gave to their questions, proved him in a state of insanity. Clementina and Sitera anxiously inquired the gentleman's opinion; he told them he had a very violent fever, and some very alarming symptoms; nor could he give any satisfactory answer concerning what might be the issue of his disorder:—he however assured them, he
would

would do all in his power to forward his recovery.

They both returned him their sincere thanks.—Sifera begged to know how the report concerning their death could be believed; and the particulars of her father's dissolution, as she supposed he attended him in his illness.—He answered in the affirmative, and related to her exactly the same train of circumstances which the husbandman had before communicated to her brother.—Clementina was in the room at the same time he mentioned the account of her having been supposed to poison her sister.

Her situation is more easily to be conceived than described:—that she should be suspected to murder a sister whom she so dearly loved, and whose death she so much regretted,—the idea was almost too horrid for her to support:—an illness of some days followed the sudden shock she felt at the physician's recital; for though no proof could have been brought to confirm so terrible a charge, yet she shuddered at the thought of the distress and horror it would have occasioned her.—They now wondered not at Percival's illness, and supposed his talking so much about the light and appearance in the abbey, was occasioned by the report of its being haunted.

New difficulties now perplexed them; a week had elapsed, and no signs of amendment appeared in signor Maferini's disorder; yet all their money was nearly exhausted.—In this dilemma they resolved to apply to the physician; he immediately lent them as much as they desired:—and if at any time they should want more, he begged they would speak, and he would with pleasure accommodate them.

In

In about a month, signor Maferini began to alter for the better; he talked more rationally, and by degrees gained strength; in six weeks he was able to leave his room, and soon after, by the assiduity and judgment of the doctor, found himself nearly as well as ever.—He returned the good man a thousand thanks for his care and friendship, and hoped it would soon be in his power to repay him the sum he had lent them: he also begged him to contradict, as much as possible, the scandalous report his cousin had propagated, and make it known he now intended to live by the practice of his pencil.—The physician promised to comply with his wishes, and assured him he should consider himself happy to serve him in any respect.

Signor Maferini paid a visit to the old uncle, at whose death he was to receive the fortune before mentioned;—he was astonished at the sight of him, railed at count D'Ollifont for his villany, and testified the greatest joy at seeing his nephew.

Percival now began to apply himself to his profession; he was soon known, but received with coldness by those who once called themselves his friends; his abilities, however, gained him patrons, and his industry preserved them; he was in a little time able to discharge his debt to the physician, and found he could earn not only a comfortable but a genteel provision.—He determined, however, if possible, to retrieve some part of his father's fortune, yet resolved not to act rashly, but proceed by a due course of law.—In the first place, he wished much to see the inside of the abbey; this took up a great deal of time; he was three months before he could get a sanction to enter it; he had then to
send

send to Spain for the keys, as count D'Ollifont had them in his possession, nor would give them up without great trouble ; in short, it was near six months before he could gratify his wishes, of once more seeing the inside of Grasville Abbey.—The light and figure he had seen in the west tower, continually haunted his imagination ; and though he was not by any means superstitious, yet many disagreeable ideas served to perplex him ; he, however, never mentioned the circumstance to any one since the recovery of his reason ; not even to his wife or sister ; as he naturally supposed it would prey upon their spirits, and make them fearful of his searching the abbey, which he was determined to do alone.—Having got the keys, the day was fixed for his departure.—Clementina and Sifera wished much to accompany him ; he begged them not, as he knew it would hurt his sister extremely, to enter the family mansion under their present circumstances, and could give no pleasure to the former. He accordingly set off, attended by Edward ; they were detained a long time on the road by a violent storm, and did not arrive at Grasville Abbey till it was dark.

CHAP. X.

SIGNOR Maferina did not intend to enter the building that night; yet curiosity prompted him to take a view of the west tower; he accordingly dismounted, and told Edward to hold his horse at the front gates, while he walked round the abbey.—Having arrived at that part where he had before seen the figure and the light, he stood some time observing the window, when a faint glimmering passed a small casement a little above it. He thought it might be fancy, yet in about two minutes saw it again; his resolution was now fixed; he resolved to enter the abbey directly: having returned to Edward, without communicating his reason, he ordered him to open the gates immediately.

The poor fellow was astonished, and naturally supposed his master's head was again affected—"For heaven's sake, sir," said he, "do not attempt to enter such a dreary place at this time of night, and in the dark."

"Your light, Edward," returned his master, "will serve me: therefore open the gates without delay."

The man reluctantly produced the keys; great exertion was required to turn the lock; it, however, after some little time, yielded to force, and they beheld themselves in the large paved court.—Edward fastened the horses on the outside; at the front doors they were again detained on account of the fastenings being rusty; but after a little trouble, they opened them, and discovered the large hall or entrance of the abbey:—it was supported by
columns

columns of the ancient orders, and arched over in the Gothic style; at the farther end were a pair of heavy folding doors, which led to an extensive suite of apartments; on each side was a flight of stone stairs, which wound round to the different rooms on both sides of the building.

Grasville Abbey was an ancient structure, and had, in former times, been a place of religious worship; some monks, at a time when Italy was involved in war, kept themselves concealed in this place, on account of atrocious crimes they had committed against the state, by keeping up a correspondence with the enemies of their country: they were all discovered except one, who secreted himself in an obscure part of the abbey, while his companions suffered the most severe punishment that could possibly be inflicted on them—Their only aim was now to destroy the surviving one; they accordingly found means to mix a large quantity of poison in some food, which he had concealed, and which they observed he partook of every day; the scheme succeeded, and he fell a sacrifice to their invention, for they found the victuals after that time were never touched; he died, however, in that part where he usually resided, for his body was not discovered till many years after; and the abbey from that time was called after his name.

The late count Maserini's father purchased the estate just before his marriage, and had the whole of the internal part repaired; from him it descended to his son, who resided in it the remainder of his life. Signor Maserini plainly perceived nothing had been moved in the hall; as every article was in the same order as if the place was inhabited, and his father still the

possessor of it; but the appearance of the furniture plainly told it had been taken no care of for some time. He began to ascend those stairs which led to the west tower.

Edward followed: but his master, after some little time, suddenly turned round, and desired he would wait below and take care of the horses; the man begged of him with tears, not to go alone—Signor Maferini was pleased with this mark of his fidelity, and hastily replied,—“ However strange, Edward, my conduct may appear to you at this time, believe me, I have the most weighty reasons to justify my behaviour; and, if I live to return, you shall be acquainted with them.”

He then ran up stairs, and, strange as it may appear, was never seen again.

Edward stood for some time fixed with amazement; there was a mystery in his words and looks, which plainly told all was not right;—he heard him ascend the stairs for some time, till the sound of his footsteps died away, and all was again silent:—he then walked slowly across the court, and seated himself under the portico; the night was not by any means cold; he therefore chose that place in preference to the inside of the abbey, as he was near the horses.—Sleep in a short time overpowered him, and he did not wake till two in the morning:—he thought it strange his master was not returned, but waited another hour with some degree of impatience; at the expiration of it he was seriously alarmed; yet to enter the abbey without a light, would be madness; he therefore resolved to defer it till day-break.

Edward had heard of the abbey's being haunted, yet he always laughed at the idea; his natural courage and intrepidity forbid his

his believing such fabulous reports:—the only reason he could allege for his master's stay, was, that the wind might have blown out the lamp when he was at some intricate part of the building; and in that case it would have been impossible for him to have found his way back, there being several suites of apartments which were never inhabited in the count's lifetime, and which signor Maserini might hardly ever have seen.

As soon as it was light he again crossed the court, and ascended those stairs which his master had done before; he followed the marks of his feet up a considerable height, and then traced them through several rooms that led to the west tower:—one of these, which was rather larger than the others, was covered with footsteps of different sizes; and in one part of it lay the picture of Clementina, which signor Maserini always wore next his heart; the ribband to which it was tied seemed as if it had been torn by force, and the boards were stained with several spots of blood; there was not in any other apartment the least mark of a foot, nor any signs of their having been opened.

Edward was astonished; he almost supposed himself in a dream; yet every object realised the scene; he knew not in what manner to act; to stop any longer in the abbey was of no use; yet to whom was he to apply?—He at length resolved to go immediately to the physician, and relate to him the circumstance, as he would be the properest person to advise with concerning those measures they ought to take relative to signor Maserini's disappearance, as well as in what manner they should proceed in communicating the news to his wife and sister.

Edward took up the picture, and placed it carefully in his pocket; he then descended the stair-case, and closed the doors after him; but determined to lock neither them nor the outside gates. Having placed his master's horse in one of the stables belonging to the abbey, and mounting his own, he departed with the utmost speed towards the house of the physician.

CHAP. XI.

EDWARD found himself at the end of his journey in a few hours.—Fortunately the good man was at home, and heard his recital with the utmost consternation and surprise; he by no means approved of either the wife or sister being informed of this dreadful news, till it was more fully confirmed; and having, from the servant's account, obtained two officers of the civil power to thoroughly search the building, he resolved to attend them himself; and they set off in less than three hours after Edward's arrival.

The evening was advancing, when they beheld at some distance the lofty towers of the abbey; they were therefore obliged to defer their intention till the next morning.

Neither Clementina nor Sisera expected signor Maserini's return till the evening following the day he left his lodgings.—Edward, therefore, informed the physician they would not be unhappy, though they should receive no intelligence from them.—As soon as it was light, they entered the abbey, attended by a workman who was able to remove

remove any kind of intricate wood-work which might tend to a discovery. They first examined all those apartments that led to the west tower, and which, by the marks of the footsteps, seemed as if signor Maferin had crossed them : they plainly perceived the spots of blood, but could discover no other mark or clue to their wishes, in either of the rooms. They then searched each part on that side of the building ; but their diligence proved unsuccessful ; in short, every recess of the abbey was looked into with the most scrutinising attention ; yet not the least sign could be discovered that indicated a mortal to have been in the place, except the foot-steps and the blood.—They were all at a loss what to suppose ; and about evening they finished their search, and left the abbey, more perplexed than when they entered it.—Edward took his master's horse from the stable, and shut the gates, but determined to leave them, as before, unlocked.

After a hasty meal, the physician, two officers, and Edward, set off for the former's habitation : it was very late before they arrived there ; the men were liberally rewarded for their trouble.—Edward then consulted, what method would be the most prudent, to inform the ladies of this mournful event ; the old gentleman undertook himself the disagreeable office of communicating it to them the next morning ; it was therefore agreed, that he should remain at his house till the affair was over.—they then took leave for the night, the one grieved for the loss of his young friend, whom he had loved and admired from his infancy ; the other for an excellent master, whom he had revered and served from his cradle.

To describe the situation of Clementina and Sifera at the physician's recital, though he related the dreadful circumstance by degrees, and

with the utmost caution, would beggar description; it will therefore be necessary to draw a veil over this affecting scene; and suffice it to say, their grief was little short of distraction.—The extraordinary manner of signor Maserini's disappearance left room for the most horrid suppositions, whilst the faint hope which the uncertainty of his dissipation inspired, served to make each cruel idea more terrible and lasting.—Clementina's situation was, if possible, more dreadful than her sister's, as she was in a strange country, and some time gone with child. The physician acted like a father to them both, and declared, while he lived they should never want a friend.

The wonderful event of signor Maserini's disappearance was soon spread over the country.—Grasville Abbey was now become a place of much greater terror than before, as those suspicions of its being haunted, seemed in all probability to be confirmed; none of the peasants would go near it after dark; in short, every inhabitant was surprised and terrified.

Six weeks had not elapsed, before signor Maserini's uncle died; the fortune now devolved to his sister; a more lucky circumstance could not have happened, as she would have it in her power to support Clementina and herself in a genteel and comfortable manner, without remaining under the least obligation to any one in point of pecuniary aid; and the physician undertook to settle those affairs relative to the old gentleman's death.

In a little time, every thing was compleated, and she found herself in possession of not only a moderate, but affluent income.—Signora Maserini now determined to make the life of her sister-in-law as agreeable as possible; she knew that

that Clementina wished much to return to her own country ; nor had Sisera any desire to remain in Italy, where every object reminded her of her late misfortunes ; she therefore resolved, after Clementina was brought to bed, to consult if some method could not be taken to clear her innocence in respect to Felicia's death, and a reconciliation brought about with the lady abbess ; so that they could, without impropriety, reside totally in France.

Clementina was delivered of twins, a boy and girl ; for some time her life was despaired of, although the judgment of the physician, and the tenderness of Sisera, were equally exerted towards her recovery ; but in six weeks, to the joy of both, she so far mended as to be pronounced out of danger.

Signora Maserini now resolved to ask the doctor's opinion concerning their appearance in France.—He offered to go himself to the convent of N****, and, if possible, settle with her ladyship those disagreeable circumstances that had caused her displeasure.

Sisera returned him many thanks, and accepted his friendly assistance ; they, however, resolved to let Clementina know nothing of it, till the business was finished ; an excuse was therefore made for his leaving Italy, and his journey to France said to be on account of family affairs, which he had to transact in that country.—He was so fortunate as to return in a very short time, with the agreeable intelligence, that Clementina's character was entirely cleared, respecting her sister's death, and all their affairs settled at the convent, in an amicable manner.—This gave Clementina as much pleasure as it was possible for her to enjoy ; every thing was ready in a few weeks ; the parting with the physician was

affecting on both sides ; to speak of their obligations to him would, they knew, be the only way to make him repent of his goodness :—they were therefore necessitated to express their gratitude in as few words as possible.

A house was prepared for them in a private part of Paris, and every thing made ready for their reception.—In this state they lived for some years, and enjoyed as much happiness as the remembrance of those misfortunes they had suffered, would permit.—The children were their greatest care ; they served in some degree to dispel that melancholy which had taken so deep a root in their bosoms since signor Maserini's disappearance.

Grasville Abbey remained in the same condition, except the gradual and slow decay of the external part : it was taken no notice of by its owner, while fear and superstition prevented any interruption from those who resided near it.—Count D'Ollifont continued but a short time in Spain after the keys were returned ; he made a tour to England, and, as it was supposed, intended to settle there.

About twelve years elapsed, and nothing particular happened to distress signora Maserini or her sister-in-law, except the death of the physician and Edward ; when the former was taken ill with a violent fever, and lived but a week ; during that time she was delirious, but had before settled her affairs in such a manner, as to leave Clementina the chief part of her fortune.

Alfred and Matilda were now obliged to exert their childish abilities, to comfort their mother for the loss of her only friend ; she had often made repeated solicitations to be admitted to her father's favour ; but the marquis was obstinate, and complained of her elopement from the convent,

vent, as an excuse for his cruelty.—Her whole attention was, therefore, paid to her children; and through a fond yet mistaken notion, she impaired her income, by giving them an education far superior to any situation in life she could ever hope to procure them; they, however, rewarded her love in the tenderness of their conduct towards her, and the quickness of their capacity in receiving those instructions that were given them.

Alfred already shewed a wish for the army; his mother determined not to check his inclinations, though she dreaded the dangers he might be exposed to:—she therefore purchased a commission for him, and he soon after departed for Flanders, where the regiment was stationed.

Madame Maserini had never informed her children of the dreadful manner in which their father disappeared; she considered it might impress their young minds with a horror which might cast a gloom over the brighter scenes of life; they were therefore always taught to believe signor Maserini was killed by a fall from his horse, when hunting; nor was there any probability to suppose the real cause would ever be discovered to them, as neither Clementina nor Sifera had informed any one to the contrary.

About six months after her son's departure, madame Maserini was taken ill; for some time it was thought only a slight disorder, but afterwards confirmed to be dangerous.—The most eminent physicians were procured; but their exertions proved fruitless.—She now wished to communicate to her son that which she had so studiously kept from him; she determined however, not to relate it to Matilda, as the surprise and shock would be too great for her; this caused

madame Maferini to wish so much to see Alfred, which was before mentioned; he did not, however, arrive till her dissolution.

CHAP. XII.

EMBARRASSMENT.

*Reason, the power
To guess at right and wrong, the twinkling lamp
Of wand'ring life, that winks and wakes by turns,
Fooling the follower, betwixt shade and shining.*

CONGREVE.

“**F**ORTITUDE is one of the noblest virtues appertaining to human nature, and stamps upon those who possess it, an unfading lustre, which does honour to the name of man. He who labours under the lash of adversity, and bears up against misfortunes with a pious resignation must be pleasing to the Supreme Being, while his conduct is universally admired by his fellow-creatures.”

This was Alfred's argument to his sister, as he tenderly conjured her to moderate her grief, and look upon him not only as a brother, but as a guardian and protector.

They both had just entered their twentieth year;—Alfred was in his person handsome and manly,—Matilda beautiful and delicate:—the former's disposition was generous and noble, his tem-

temper rather impetuous; yet he was always ready to forgive; there was, however, a kind of haughty pride in his character, which would sometimes cast a shade over his other virtues.

—Matilda was amiable in the highest degree; —to give a description of her qualifications would be needless, when we say she was every thing a fond and tender parent could wish her to be.—It was not till just before they retired to rest, that Matilda recollected the paper her mother had wrote on; she took it from the *escritoire*, and gave it to her brother, who wished to read it alone, and promised to inform his sister of the contents the next morning.—As soon as he entered his chamber, he eagerly opened it, and read the almost illegible words of his dying mother :

“ TO ALFRED MASERINI.

“ BEFORE I depart from this state of mortality, and am numbered with the dead, I would wish to inform you, my dear son, of a circumstance that lies heavy at my heart.—The pains of death encompass me—yet, I will, if possible, acquaint you, your father died not in that manner you were always taught to believe :—he entered Grasville Abbey with an intent to search the building, and from that fatal period was never heard of more.—Heaven forgive me, if I judge wrongfully, or condemn the innocent! but though I have never communicated my suspicions to any one, yet I have the strongest reasons to suppose the chief person concerned in this horrid affair was——”

Madame Maserini had wrote so far, when she dropped her pen, and expired.

Alfred

Alfred was almost petrified with astonishment and horror; the fatal name, so near being known, was not yet revealed: his mother's senses might at the time be deranged; but this idea entirely vanished, when he considered how much she had wished to see him, on account of relating a circumstance she chose to communicate to no other person.—He resolved for the present to conceal this from his sister; she had already suffered enough by her mother's death: to inform her therefore of the contents of the writing, would only occasion new sorrow and distress.

The next morning, Matilda eagerly inquired the purport of her mother's letter:—she was shocked to see him look so ill, but naturally supposed he had not rested well.—Alfred told her it was a memorandum, relative to her fortune, and other matters; but she observed in him an uncommon agitation the whole evening, yet forbore to inquire further, though she was certain there was some disagreeable secret he did not chuse to divulge.

Alfred gave orders for his mother's funeral, and had her handsomely interred.—He then consulted with his sister in what manner she meant to proceed with the small sum she was now possessed of.—Madame Maserini had equally divided her fortune between them, but always particularly recommended Matilda to her brother's care; he therefore generously determined to add half of his to his sister's income, but first wished to settle her in some genteel situation before he returned to his regiment.

Alfred, after some persuasions, promised Matilda he would write to the marquis of ***, their grandfather; to inform him of his daughter's death, and her situation.—She considered, as lady Eleanor had been dead some time, and his

his hopes concerning her marriage entirely at an end, that he might receive her with some degree of tenderness, though he never would look upon their mother.

The young foldier felt himself hurt to write a letter of supplication to a man who had behaved so inhumanly to his own daughter, and flightingly to himself and sister;—however, the idea of Matilda's welfare quenched those sparks of pride which had before kindled in his bosom.

About a week after madame Maserini's funeral, he sent the following letter, in which might be observed a kind of inward disdain, not likely to move or gain upon the feelings of a man so utterly void of sensibility as the marquis.

FROM ALFRED MASERINI, to the
MARQUIS of * * * *.

“ MY LORD,

“ IMPRESSED with the idea that natural propriety as well as common respect commands me to acquaint you with the death of my mother, I have taken the liberty to trouble your lordship with a letter, under the sanction of communicating that information: although the dissolution of a daughter whom you have never seen, nor perhaps heard of for many years, may signify but little to your lordship's feelings, and the knowledge of it appear frivolous and impertinent, when conveyed by the hand-writing of her son.

“ But, if possible, my lord, a more forcible reason urged me to intrude on your patience; it is to supplicate a small share of that favour
and

and protection for my sister Matilda Maferini, which her mother was so unfortunate as never to receive.—Your lordship must naturally suppose my station in life prevents me from affording her that attention so necessary at her present age and situation; the service of my country will, in a very short time, call me to Flanders; otherwise I should glory to make it known to your lordship and the world, that I could prove myself her guardian and protector, without remaining under an obligation to either relations or friends.

“Your lordship, except myself, is the nearest relation she has; it is, therefore, from you she hopes to find that countenance which will prevent her being looked on with contempt, and consequently, preserve her from temptations and insults; for, when parted from her brother, deserted by her other relations, and forsaken by those who in the time of prosperity and affluence called themselves her friends, your lordship must consider she will stand a fit object of prey for wretches whose whole life is dedicated to the seduction of virtue, and the ruin of female innocence.—The idea, my lord, almost drives me to madness; yet a horrid thought will sometimes intrude, that she may, more through necessity than inclination, prove a disgrace to her family, and an everlasting curse to my happiness. Were such a suspicion by any means well grounded, or even if I had not the most perfect confidence in her virtue and honour, I should bless that hand which would strike her to the heart, and enjoy the moment when I beheld her at my feet a breathless corpse.

“The annuity left her by her mother, added to that part of my income which I mean to make over to her, will support her in such a manner

manner that she will be no disgrace to your lordship. I only wish to obtain for her permission to reside with you; her accomplishments, manners, and behaviour, are such as no nobleman need be ashamed of: and permit me to say, my lord, her natural goodness of heart, and gratitude for your protection, will make her a comfort to your declining years.

“ I hope your lordship will take the purport of this letter into consideration; and that your lordship’s opinion may coincide with the supplication I have made for my sister, is the sincere wish of

“ My lord,

“ Your lordship’s obedient nephew,

“ ALFRED MASERINI.”

“ *Paris.*”

This letter was dispatched as soon as possible, and the messenger ordered to wait for an answer. He returned the next day, and delivered Alfred a small packet sealed up.—Matilda’s heart beat high with expectation; she eagerly watched her brother’s looks while he read a few words which were written on the outside paper; but soon observed by his countenance there was nothing he hoped for from the marquis.—She faintly asked what were the contents.—“ Short and explicit!” he answered, while pride and contempt were visible in his features.—“ Read (said he), and judge of it yourself, Matilda.”—He threw it on the table; she, trembling took it up, and read the following words:

“ To

" TO ALFRED MASERINI.

" THE marquis detested your mother ;— he has also the same hatred against her children ; your childish and romantic petition was read ;—the violent passion it caused in him, has brought on a fever :—his orders were, that this note should be written and sent to you by

" FATHER LAURENCE."

" But what letter was that," asked Matilda, " which was inclosed in this paper ?"

Alfred shewed it her ; it was his own letter returned ; they had heard that a priest was the constant companion of the marquis : and that it was supposed he would stand a chance for some part of his patron's wealth ; but the messenger informed them that father Laurence intirely lived at the castle, and that the marquis had been heard to say, several times, he should leave him the whole of his fortune.

The only person they now had to apply to, was a gentleman in England, a distant relation of their mother's : he had been sent over to this country by an uncle, on affairs relative to the family. The old gentleman died while he was in London, and left him a small fortune : after this event, he determined to settle in the city, and commenced business in the liquor trade :— he first kept wine-vaults, from that rose a step higher, and was called a wine-merchant : in this line he accumulated a considerable deal of money by importing foreign goods to this country. —To add to his good fortune he one year received a prize of ten thousand pounds from the lottery ; and in about two years after married an heiress whose fortune amounted to three times that sum.

The

The friends of the lady were at first so displeased with the union, that for some months no notice was taken of her ; but time soon brought about a reconciliation ;—they determined to make the best of her husband, that he might not in his present situation in life disgrace their name and family ; his wife was a woman of fashion, and had to her name the additional title of lady ; they therefore found means to get their new relation knighted ; and he now was distinguished by the appellation of sir Peter Peviquil. His brother-in law died about two years after their marriage, and having no family, left his sister an income of six hundred a year ; they now thought proper to quit business entirely, and reside at the court end of the town ; their manner of living was, according to lady Peviquil's wishes, in the first style and taste : they were noted for giving the most superb and elegant entertainments of any in London ; in short, sir Peter and lady Peviquil were allowed to be the first fashionable couple in the great metropolis.

CHAP. XIII.

MADAME Maferini had received repeated solicitations from her relation, to visit him in London ; she, accordingly, a few months after Sifera's death, determined to see England, considering it might dispel the melancholy that event had occasioned her :—the children she committed to the care of a faithful servant, during

during her stay, which was about two months. Mr. Peviquil had not then quitted business: she received the most polite and friendly attention both from him and his lady, and resided totally at their house while she remained in this country. She always since that time had spoken of them to Alfred and Matilda, as people well worthy their esteem, and had often regretted their living so far distant as to make their society impossible.

Since his mother's death, Alfred had received a letter of condolence from sir Peter, who had accidentally heard the news from a friend; this letter contained a kind and pressing invitation for them to spend a few months in England; which offer they were now resolved to accept, provided Alfred could obtain leave of absence long enough, and permission to quit his country. This, through interest, he accomplished, on condition he should be ready to return at a short notice.

Matilda, little used to the gaiety of the world, though she had nearly all her life resided in a city renowned for its luxury and dissipation, considered that if she was pleased with Sir Peter's family, by paying a small gratuity she could reside with them without any inconvenience.—This was, in some degree, Alfred's opinion; but he was much better acquainted with mankind, and the dangers that attend a fashionable life, to view this scheme in so pleasing a light as his sister.—He well knew the dissipated life of intrigue, and other vices, so closely followed by most of the English circles: he had been necessitated, in some respects, to partake of those follies in Paris, which he knew were daily practised in London: and his soul sickened at the thought of leaving Matilda exposed

posed to such dangers, friendless and unprotected.—Possessed of that nice sense of honour which is supposed to constitute the soldier and the gentleman, it in some respect served to make his life uncomfortable.—Generous to a great degree, he was never so happy as when he could make others so; but a haughty and stubborn pride hurt him when he received an obligation.—Ready to take an affront, and as ready to resent it, he was sometimes disagreeable company; yet his person, behaviour, and character, procured him admittance to the first parties.

Matilda was totally unacquainted with the vices of the great; her mother had only kept up the society of a few friends since her return to France; yet her manners were elegant without affectation; her deportment graceful, yet easy, and her accomplishments by no means inferior to the first ranks of life.—Yet her ideas of the world in general were entirely ill founded; she judged of others by herself, and had so little notion of the villany of mankind, as to be easily deceived by any one under the mask of flattery and dissimulation.

After some persuasions of his sister, Alfred determined to answer sir Peter's letter, with an acceptance of his kind invitation; the same day month was fixed for their departure, and that period of time filled up with necessary preparations for their journey.

Matilda was all expectation, yet a deep melancholy still clouded her future prospects; the loss of her mother preyed much on her spirits; and while her eye beamed pleasure at the idea of seeing London and gay life, a watery gem would oft intrude, and dim its lustre, when she considered

considered the distance she should be from the tomb of a parent whom she had so dearly loved, and whose memory she so much revered. Alfred was silent and thoughtful; his spirits were fled; the contents of the paper written by his mother served to perplex and distress him, while his anxiety for the welfare of his sister continually preyed upon his mind. As the time drew nearer for their leaving Paris, he became less pleased with the plan on which they were going to proceed; he had always heard his mother speak highly of the family; but their situation in life at that time was entirely different from the present.—Though in a capital line of business, they neither were considered, nor looked upon themselves, as people of fashion; their manner of living, as he now understood, was one continual scene of gaiety and dissipation. Those reports might be false; and on their being so, he entirely placed his hopes respecting Matilda's making one of their family.

Sir Peter's letter was extremely friendly; to have refused what he so earnestly requested, would not only have been impolite behaviour, but would without doubt, have offended him.—This mode of reasoning, in some degree, lessened his disquietude; yet he resolved within himself not to leave his sister in England, without being certain her situation was strictly accordant both with propriety and honour.

The day of their departure at length arrived.—Matilda, as they passed through the gates of the city, bid a melancholy adieu to her native country.—The recollection of those happy juvenile hours she had enjoyed with a parent whose tenderness and maternal fondness she she never more could experience, added to her
her

her ideas of the friendless situation and unprotected condition she would be left in when parted from her brother; entirely overcame that fortitude she had shewn at the beginning of their journey; and, almost convulsed with grief, she burst into an agony of tears.

Alfred raised his head from a rêverie which he had been in from their first setting off; he conjured his sister to be composed, and once more tenderly assured her of his protection.—A post carriage conveyed them from Paris to Calais; an elderly man attended them, who had lived in the capacity of a servant with their mother, since the death of Edward; he was by birth an Englishman, though he chiefly had resided in France.

They were necessitated to wait some time for the packet-boat; Matilda, therefore, who was much indisposed, retired to take a few hours' rest, while Alfred looked over some papers of his mother's, which were in a small trunk.

Matilda had not yet examined it, supposing it to be full of waste papers, which were of no consequence; she only brought it with her to hold a few articles of dress when she arrived in London.

After having removed a few of the upper papers, he discovered a miniature of his mother; it was the same which Edward found in the abbey, and had the identical piece of ribband hanging to the ring, the remaining part of which had seemingly been broken by force, or by a sudden shock.—Alfred looked on the resemblance with attention; he contemplated the features of his departed mother, with a melancholy pleasure, and sighed at the idea that he never more should look on the original.—Close to it was the picture of his father.

father.—Alfred had always been told he was extremely like him, and for the first time thought so himself.—Both he and his sister had often seen the miniatures before their mother's illness, and after her death every place was searched for them, but to no purpose; nor had they the least idea of their being placed in this trunk.

Alfred carefully looked over the papers, and found none of them worth notice, till he had nearly emptied them all out upon the table, when a roll of parchment, with the name of Sifera Maferini at the bottom, struck his eye. He immediately perused it, and found it was written by his aunt, about six months before her death.—It contained an account of their misfortunes, from his father's first seeing his mother at the convent, till their return to France, and every minute particular relative to signor Maferini's entrance of Grasville Abbey, and his disappearance.—She also at one part seemed to suspect his cousin, count D'Ollifont, to be privy to the affair, though he was then in Spain.

Alfred's emotion and astonishment were past description; he burnt with eager desire to see the inside of the Abbey; but that would now be impossible, till he should return to France.—He knew not how to revenge the loss of his father, as no proof could be brought to charge any one with the guilt;—yet, according to what he had read, he could not avoid supposing that the count was concerned: nor was there a doubt but his mother also intended to have written the same name.

He carefully placed the manuscript in a private drawer of his own, and determined not to inform his sister of the event, as her spirits were

were already agitated enough, without any new source for horror or distress.

When she rose, he agreeably surprised her by the discovery of the pictures, and informed her he had looked over the papers in the trunk, and could find none but frivolous fragments of no use or consequence.

They were obliged to remain at the place till the beginning of the next day ; they then crossed over to Dover, and slept there that night. —Matilda was yet much indisposed, partly occasioned by sea-sickness. —The next evening, after a fatiguing day of post travelling, they found themselves at a principal inn at London.

CHAP. XIV.

*Would you rekindle all your ancient fires ?
Extinguish first your modern vain desires :
Still it is yours, your glories to retrieve ;
Lop but the branches and the tree shall live :
With these erect a pile for sacrifice ;
And in the midst throw all your cards and dice !*

WHEN the soul is totally absorbed in melancholy reflections on past misfortunes, we are too apt to encourage oppressive ideas, by taking a retrospect of the calamities that may attend futurity.

These ideas sink our spirits under new horrors and distress ; imagination presents to the
fancy

fancy troubles and sorrows we are never likely to experience.

To be too confident of our success and abilities at the first out-set in life, naturally leads to extravagance and neglect; we are disappointed at our ambition not being gratified so early as we expected, and consequently sicken of that employment which occasions our mortification and chagrin.—Yet diffidence and timidity are far worse companions to struggle with through the rugged path of life: we continually stumble on dangers and vexations in our hazardous voyage; while they chiefly contribute to multiply adversity, and paint the events that may succeed, worse than those we have already suffered.

Fortitude forsakes the breast which is governed by terror and self-interest; happiness is no more, the sun shine of hope is eclipsed by the heavy cloud of despair, and we sink into that misery, which, though courage and exertion, we might have overcome with honour and respect.

Matilda did not totally despair: and Alfred, by conversations of this nature, strove to dispel that melancholy which was settled on her features during the latter part of their journey.—It was entirely through her persuasion that her brother undertook the affair; she was now sorry she had biased his opinion; for she even regretted leaving Paris; and the nearer she arrived to London, her pleasure in seeing it gradually decreased.

Reflection had in a great degree lessened those expectations she supposed would be gratified when she entered this city; and the romantic ideas she had formed of remaining with Sir Peter's family in England, seemed now to have
many

many obstacles which she never before thought of.

It was about six o'clock, in a wet uncomfortable evening of February, when they arrived at the inn.—After some little time, the chief part of their baggage was put into a hackney coach, and Leonard, who was tolerably well acquainted with London, dispatched in it to Grosvenor-square, with a polite message, saying his master and miss Maserini would pay their respects in person, in less than two hours.

Alfred and Matilda, having ordered coffee, remained till near eight; during which time they made some little alteration in their dress.—They then stepped into a hack, and ordered it also to drive to sir Peter Peviquil's in Grosvenor-square.

Neither of them was under any embarrassment concerning the English language, as they both had been used to converse in it from their childhood, and pronounced it nearly as well as their own language.

On their arrival at the place to which they had ordered the coachman to drive, the square was full of carriages; nor did they observe more than one hackney-coach in the whole train:—they stopped close to it, unable to proceed any farther for the crowd.—Alfred looked out to see if there was any probability of their getting nearer to sir Peter's house, which he was informed was on the opposite side of the square; when, to his inexpressible surprise, by the light of a footman's flambeau, who passed at the same time, he beheld Leonard in the coach he had before noticed, seated with the baggage in the same state as when he set out from the inn.

The man at the same moment recognised his master, and acquainted him that he found, from his first entrance in the square, it would be impossible for him to get to the door of sir Peter's house, there being a grand entertainment there in honour of his daughter's birthday; and that the gentlemen's carriages would not permit a common hack to draw up:—he was, therefore, afraid to go himself in search of it, on account of the baggage he must have left behind; but he said he had sent several messages to the servants concerning his situation, but that he had received no answer.

Alfred was vexed, yet he could not help smiling at the fellow's recital: they were now in a line of carriages leading to the house: he knew it would be some time before they could arrive there; yet to walk would be almost impossible, on account of his sister, as the rain poured down with uncommon violence.—They therefore determined to wait till the coach, in due course, should draw up to the door; in about twenty minutes they found themselves before the entrance of sir Peter's mansion.

The coachman, by Alfred's order, knocked a single rap:—a footman in a handsome livery appeared; he asked in a surly manner, what was wanted? the man answered, a gentleman in a hackney coach wanted to see sir Peter Peviquil.

The footman replied with some insolence, "His master could not then be spoke with," and immediately shut the door.

Alfred's pride (who overheard this conversation), took fire;—he directly gave the coachman a card, and ordered him to knock a double

double rap at the door, and desire the servant to deliver it to sir Peter.

The man at first hesitated, but at last complied with the request.—In a short time he returned with a polite message from sir Peter, requesting they would make his house their home; and that he himself would, if possible, welcome them to England in less than an hour.

The servant was now all civility; both the coaches were discharged, and Leonard saw the baggage safe in the house; while Alfred and Matilda were conducted by sir Peter's valet, through a noble hall, elegantly adorned with lamps, and lined with servants in waiting, to a handsome parlour.—The house seemed in total confusion; and the number of fashionable company and nobility that was there, was evident from their names being announced, as they ascended the great stairs leading to the rooms of reception.

Sir Peter's genteel conduct in some degree compensated for the impertinence of his porter, and banished that anger from Alfred's bosom, which the insolence of the latter had occasioned. In about two hours the gentleman himself appeared: he tenderly embraced them both, and expressed, with the most pleasing affability, his happiness in seeing them in London: he regretted (he said) the etiquette which prevented lady Peviquil and his daughter from leaving the rooms above, to perform the duties of hospitality and politeness; but that he was sure they would impatiently wait for the breakfast hour in the morning, to be introduced to their amiable relations.

He, however, begged they would make themselves happy; order supper, and retire to

rest at what time they thought proper, as chambers were prepared for them, and also proper accommodation for their servant.—He then took his leave for the rest of the evening, and left the young travellers highly delighted with his courteous behaviour.

They made but a short repast, though the table was spread with dainties elegantly served up; about twelve they desired to be conducted to their different apartments; but the noise of the house, and their own reflections, prevented either of them from enjoying repose.

C H A P. XV.

THE noise and confusion in the house did not seem over before four in the morning;—Matilda heard the doors fastened half an hour after;—and about five, silence reigned through every part.

She once more strove to drive away uncomfortable reflections, and fell into a disturbed slumber: distressing dreams harassed her imagination with horrid visions; the figure of her mother was constantly before her eyes, reproaching her for entering a house remarkable for gaiety and dissipation.

She awoke about ten, but little refreshed, and hurried up for fear of detaining the breakfast-table; but to her great surprise, as she descended the stair-case, a servant was but just opening the windows. She inquired at what hour

hour the family assembled in the breakfast parlour; the man answered, generally at half past eleven, sometimes twelve.

Alfred had been up near an hour, and was equally astonished with his sister, at the servant's intelligence:—he proposed a walk round the square, till the sitting-rooms were in order; which she gladly accepted.

Matilda seized the opportunity to ask her brother, considering the little they had seen, how he liked their situation;—and also his opinion of sir Peter.

Alfred replied, from the short time he had been in the company of sir Peter Peviquil, he seemed to be a man who would interest any one in his favour, even at a first interview.

“But, Matilda,” said he, “we must not depend too much on the smooth, well-timed speeches of a man of fashion: for though both he and the family in general were friendly and agreeable in every respect, yet their manner of living would kill you.—Leonard informed me last night, that he had learnt from the servants, the family hardly ever retired to rest before three or four in the morning;—that they were never without company when at home, and that their rooms are filled with the first people of distinction and fashion.—Even if their dissipation did not affect your health, you certainly must consider how improper a situation this is, for a young woman whose fortune is barely competent to support her.

Matilda acquiesced with his observation, yet was hurt at the idea of her own insignificance.

In about an hour they returned to the house;—preparations were made for breakfast, but the family had not assembled.

Sir Peter, in a short time, entered the room, and introduced his lady, daughter, and son.

Lady Peviquil was, in person, tall and elegant, her deportment was graceful, and in her manner she was the woman of fashion;—yet a haughty pride in her disposition was visible, even to a common beholder, at first sight; and cast a deep shade over those accomplishments which showed her a lady of rank.—Miss Peviquil had the day before entered her nineteenth year; she was tall, genteel, lively, and good tempered; in the ornamental part of education she was accomplished, but, like her mother, a total stranger to domestic duties.—In conversation, she was gay and witty, and accounted, by the connoisseurs of fashionable manners, a tolerably smart pretty girl.

Henry Peviquil was one-and-twenty; entirely free from pride, handsome in his person, and pleasing in his behaviour and address; extremely dissipated, and fond of being thought so.

He had received the education of a gentleman, and was left a fortune of six hundred a year by an uncle of his mother's.—He was shortly expected to set out on the grand tour, and only waited till a proper companion could be obtained.

The young travellers were treated in the most friendly manner by sir Peter.—Lady Peviquil, her daughter, and Matilda, took an airing in the coach; while Henry drove his new friend round Hyde Park in his curricule.

Cards were delivered out to form a select party of friends in the evening, who were to be introduced to the young foreigners.

At

At their return, they drest for dinner, which was served up by candle-light.—The select party at night consisted of about thirty persons of fashion and distinction.—The formal introduction to them all by her ladyship, was tiresome and disagreeable to Matilda; yet she returned the compliments of each individual with a grace which did honour even to the drawing-room of sir Peter Peviquil.

Alfred had been used to the gaieties of Paris, and being as well versed as his sister in the English language, found himself under no embarrassment in a London company.

The next day he declared his intention of taking lodgings for himself and servant; this was strongly opposed by sir Peter; but he persisted in his resolution, and begged the assistance of Mr. Peviquil in the undertaking.—Henry with his usual good-nature, eagerly complied with the request, and declared, he knew of handsome apartments that were to be let in Bond-street; which was no great distance from Grosvenor-square, and made it the more agreeable, as sir Peter requested he would spend as much of his time as possible with him and his family.

The gentlemen viewed the rooms that morning, while the ladies attended a music-meeting.—Alfred approved much of their situation and convenience; he immediately engaged them, and was to take possession the next day.

Henry Peviquil was engaged for the beginning of the evening, and sir Peter rather indisposed with a cold; it was therefore agreed that Alfred should escort her ladyship, his sister, and miss Peviquil to the theatre; and a stage-box was accordingly retained for them.

Matilda was delighted with the tragedy, which was Hamlet:—although her knowledge of the language would not permit her to understand every sentence, yet she could perfectly make out the plot and management of the piece; and was charmed with the ingenuity of the author.—Her ladyship paid more attention to the company than to the stage; while her daughter was entirely taken up in observing Alfred, whose attention was fixed on a lady in the opposite box.—Her figure and manner charmed him; in short, the latter part of the evening he quite neglected the performance, in the notice he took of the fair incognita.

At the close of the entertainment, Alfred inquired of lady Peviquil the name of the young lady opposite them: her ladyship answered, “It was lady Caroline Albourn, daughter of lord Albourn, a nobleman renowned for his large fortune and good character; and, lady Caroline,” continued her ladyship, “is allowed to be a beautiful and accomplished young lady.”—“My ideas, my lady,” returned Alfred, “perfectly agree, in the former observation, with the opinion of the world.”

“Lord! Mr. Maferini,” said miss Peviquil, hurt at the compliment paid to another, “surely there are as handsome women in the house as lady Caroline Albourn!”

“Pardon me, madam,” replied Alfred, “all are handsome; yet some more beautiful than others; nor can the remark be more fully exemplified, than when lady Caroline or miss Peviquil make their appearance.”

This well-turned compliment entirely stifled the resentment of the lady, and she immediately

diately resumed her usual gaiety and good temper.

As they crossed the lobby, they were met by Henry Peviquil, who, after helping Alfred to assist the ladies to their coach, stopped him from following.

"Ladies," said he, "I must request you will dispense with the company of your knight-errant from conducting you home, as I arrest him for the remainder of the night.—Therefore, my dear Maferini, take leave of the fair damsels, and follow me."

Alfred begged to be excused, and desired he would consider there were none but ladies in the coach.

"Oh!" returned Henry, "there is a footman behind, who is able to defend twice as many."

"I do not take it kind of you," said her ladyship, "to force Mr. Maferini from us, if you do not like to attend yourself."

Matilda was anxious her brother should return with them, and miss Peviquil afraid of losing the gallant conversation of the young Frenchman: but it availed nothing:—Henry, after begging all their pardons, and declaring he would make it up with them in the morning, closed the coach door, and ordered the coachman to drive home.

He then laid hold of Alfred's arm, and told him he must now introduce him to a set of friends, whose names he did not chuse to mention before the ladies: "for though," said he, "I am not a gamester myself, yet I spend some of my time in the fashionable company of those who love play."

Alfred was rather displeased at his impetuous behaviour ; but considered it as the warmth of his friendship, and the consequence of his having partaken that evening rather too freely of the bottle.

They arrived, after some time, at a well-known house in St. James's-street, and were conducted to the room of fashionable company.

Alfred was struck with their appearance : —the horrid countenances of some, whom fortune had not so favoured that evening, —the intoxicated joy of others who had emptied the pockets of their friends, —and the extreme agitation of the whole assembly, whose expectations were all on the table, made it a scene of disagreeable reflection to those who had never been addicted to that destructive vice.

Alfred plainly perceived his companion was well known to them ; he was asked to play, but refused ; and Alfred likewise begged to remain out, but was obliged to bet, that he might not seem particular, as all those who did not sit down, laid on the success of each player : —but the stakes were not large at their part of the room.

In about an hour a table was vacant, and a party accordingly mustered to fill it. Alfred was over persuaded, and sat down with Henry Peviquil, who proposed no high play : —this was unanimously agreed upon, and a small sum settled, to the satisfaction of every person. —They broke up in about three hours, and Alfred found himself a winner of about a guinea. —He was complimented on his judgment of the game, and invited for the next evening. —Henry and Alfred both returned to Grosvenor-

Grosvenor-square, and arrived there about four in the morning.

When the family met the next day, Henry Peviquil made his peace with the ladies ;—but he found more difficulty in the undertaking than he expected :—his mother and sister were seriously offended ; nor could Matilda forgive him, though she was necessitated to say to the contrary.

Alfred was far from being displeased with the company he had seen ; struck as he was at first with their appearance, the latter part of the time they seemed more agreeable to him ; and their ready acquiescence to play for a small sum, confirmed him in the mistaken opinion that they were not a common class of gamblers.—He was not averse to meet them the following evening, nor did morning reflection by any means alter his ideas concerning the transactions of the night.

Lady Peviquil informed them, she had summoned a numerous company for that evening, “ and among the rest,” added her ladyship, with a smile, which was well understood, “ I expect lord Albourn and his daughter.”

Alfred was struck with astonishment—he had engaged himself to the party in St. James’s-street ; but this obstacle to his wishes he determined to surmount, by begging Henry Peviquil to make his excuse, as he could not possibly be guilty of such impolite behaviour, as to absent himself from lady Peviquil’s drawing-room, when she herself requested his company.—But he might have saved himself the trouble, as Henry intended to spend the fore-part of the evening in Grosvenor-square ; yet he insisted

sisted on Alfred's accompanying him there, after the rooms closed, which, he supposed, would not be very late.

CHAP. XVI.

MATILDA took more pains than usual at the toilet :—she understood from lady Peviquil that numbers of fashionable people were to be there ; she therefore considered it would be a compliment to her ladyship to make some few additions to her dress, which consisted of white satin.—She wore the picture of her father suspended on her bosom, by a gold cross and chain ; her appearance was beautiful, and she received no small compliments from sir Peter and his son.—Lady Peviquil and her daughter were rather cool in their behaviour, and seemed envious of her superior beauty and elegance.

The rooms began to fill at nine o'clock, and many persons of distinction were announced : among the rest the Spanish ambassador was ushered in, and begged to introduce to sir Peter and his lady, an intimate friend, who had accompanied him from Spain to England. The gentleman was a foreigner of note, rather in the decline of life ; yet his person was handsome, and his manners elegant and accomplished :—his excellency had not yet been made known to Alfred or Matilda ; sir Peter therefore introduced them both at one time, the

the first as the Spanish ambassador, the second as count D'Ollifont.

Alfred was struck motionless with horror and surprise; the supposed murderer of his father stood before him;—nor was the count's embarrassment less; for before sir Peter could mention the name of Maserini, he cast his eye on the picture of their father; his countenance immediately turned pale, and he showed the greatest emotion.

Matilda, though she had never heard her mother speak highly of the count, received him with politeness; but Alfred, after a few cold compliments, joined lord Albourn and his daughter at another part of the room.

The behaviour of both gentlemen was generally noticed:—but each excused himself, by saying it was surprise at the sudden introduction to a relation almost unknown.

The count seemed struck with Matilda's figure and address; he chiefly attended her the whole evening; which caused great envy and uneasiness in the breasts of her fair friends; among these was miss Peviquil, who was extremely hurt at being forsaken by Alfred Maserini, and more so at receiving such a few compliments from the ambassador and his friend.

Alfred dedicated the whole evening to lady Caroline, nor did she seem by any means displeased at the attention paid her by the young Frenchman; her father gave him a general invitation to Soho-square, as the friend and relation of sir Peter Peviquil.

The agreeable conversation he had with the young lady, in some measure made up for the surprise, horror, and dissatisfaction he felt at an introduction to the count.

The

The attention paid Matilda by her relation did not pass unnoticed by her brother; he determined next day to hint to his sister his dislike of him, without entering into a particular detail of circumstances, which would only distress and perplex her.

The rooms began to thin about twelve; and in a little time after, lord Albourn and his daughter took their leave; Alfred conducted the latter to her carriage, then joined Henry Peviquil, and proceeded to St. James's-street.

The same company was assembled, with some additions; and one of the strangers was at the table where Henry and his friend were placed; they played higher than the night before, and Alfred, at the breaking up of the party about half past four in the morning, found himself a loser of thirty pounds; he paid the money without the least chagrin, and was promised his revenge the next evening.—Henry Peviquil was also declared a debtor to the table, of twenty guineas.—They parted a little way from the house,—the latter for Grosvenor-square,—the former for his new lodgings in Bond-street.

Matilda had taken notice of her brother at his introduction to the count, nor could she conceive a reason for his abrupt behaviour; her surprise, however, was greatly heightened at the slighting manner in which he spoke of him, when they were alone the following day.—In vain she asked his meaning for the dislike he showed; the more they conversed on the subject, his conversation appeared the more strange and intricate.—His ideas also seemed entirely changed concerning their residence in London; her fears of dissipation and
bad

bad hours he laughed at; declared himself pleased with sir Peter's family; and would not permit her to mention a wish of leaving it.

Alfred was a constant attendant at lord Albourn's, the fore part of the day; the latter he generally spent in the gay family of sir Peter; and the night and beginning of the morning at a gaming-table:—he was now universally known as a man of fashion, and his name familiar in the first circles, as the dissipated, lively, and handsome Frenchman.

His sister saw, with concern, the effects of their London journey; she could plainly observe her brother's fortune would be soon exhausted, in the manner he lived;—his character, as a gambler, was constantly made free with, and his midnight exploits and quarrels, commonly mentioned in general conversations.—Her own situation was also particularly disagreeable.—Harassed by the assiduities of the count and many other admirers, she was continually plagued with their importunities and flattery.—Lady Peviquil had entirely thrown off the few amiable qualities she seemed to possess; and being further acquainted with her circumstances and friendless situation, she treated her little better than a dependant on her bounty.

Miss Peviquil hated her for her beauty, and was hardly civil; in vain Matilda begged her brother to leave England, and return to France; he laughed at her complaints; she requested him only to conduct her there, and she would immediately place herself in a convent, and cause him no further trouble:—but her solicitations were vain; the destructive vice of gaming had already taken possession of him:
every

every obstacle, difficulty, and interest, vanished before it; even the welfare of his sister, the honour of his family, the treatment of his father, and the desire he had to see Grasville Abbey, was thought of no more, when the gaming-table appeared; lady Caroline was almost forgot; in short, every sentiment of fortitude, courage, humanity, with other virtues which stamped on him the name of a gentleman and a foldier, were almost swallowed up in a cursed infatuation for a fashionable vice.

Sir Peter, who was entirely governed by his lady, paid hardly any attention to his fair relation:—the whole family treated her with the utmost indifference, except Henry Peviquil:—his gallantry, like that of the count, was entirely disgusting; and the most villanous views appeared under the mask of friendly concern and pity for her situation; he would often hint his knowledge of her circumstances, and the extravagance of her brother; which extravagance he first introduced him to:—his discourse would then turn into violent protestations of his regard for her, and admiration of her beauty and accomplishments.

Before Alfred, he showed no further signs of particularity in his behaviour than what common politeness required. Affairs were in this state, when one evening, at a grand ball given by lady Peviquil, a stranger was introduced under the name of Milverne, an only son of a lord of that name: he was just arrived from Italy, where he had attended his father, who was in a declining state of health:—his elegant figure and agreeable manners were universally noticed:—he was requested to open the entertainment with a minuet, and a
lady

ady was also fixed on for that purpose; but the latter being rather indisposed, declined the ceremony and fatigue attending on single dancing: the young gentleman was therefore obliged to take another partner, and he immediately requested the hand of Matilda: praises were whispered through every part of the room, at the elegance and grace of the young performers; nor did Mr. Milverne's attention end here; he continued among the crowd of her admirers the whole evening, and greatly interrupted the soft speeches of the count.

Alfred danced with lady Caroline: but he was by no means so great a favourite with his lordship as at their first interviews; nor did he seem pleased with his daughter's resigning her hand to him as a partner: lady Caroline herself appeared much attached to him; and Matilda thought she could perceive, in her eyes and manner, something more than common regard; yet she never, in the several visits and times she had seen her ladyship, which had brought on an intimacy between the young ladies, received the least information to confirm the opinion her ideas had suggested.

The company broke up about five in the morning;—Matilda, vexed with the impertinence of the count and Henry Peviquil, yet pleased with the conversation of Mr. Milverne:—her brother equally hurt at the cool nanner and treatment of Lord Albourn, but happy in finding his lordship's sentiments against him were not imbibed by his fair daughter.

CHAP.

CHAP. XVII.

REFLECTION.

*The thoughts of glory past, the present shame,
A thousand griefs shall waken at the name.*

POPE'S HOMER.

THERE are a number of vicious and licentious vices, which will so far triumph over human nature, as to seduce those from a track of virtue, that for years have been respected as valuable members of society.—Yet we see few but what, at some time or other, feel the most severe pangs from remorse of conscience, and a retrospect of the fair character they once held in the world; contrasted with the scorn and slighting treatment they are necessitated to suffer from many, who, at an early part of life, would have been proud of their esteem, yet have lived to behold their superiors reduced to the lowest state of penury and distress.

Reflection is never more poignant than when happy scenes, once enjoyed, are compared with the misery of a present state,—which misery has been occasioned by neglect, indolence, or extravagance.—The most abandoned experience moments, when acute feelings assail them with redoubled force; yet these feelings in some measure serve only to harden them in their crimes, and drive them to acts of desperation.—On others they take different effect; repentance,

repentance, and shame for what is past, urge them to amend for the future; give them strength and inclination to disentangle themselves from those embarrassments they are plunged into, and make them more cautious and wary through the remainder of life.

Alfred, at serious intervals, was nearly distracted with the idea of his own conduct; yet he had no power to reform: those resolutions of amendment, made in a morning, were thought of no more when the gambling hour approached; his care for the welfare of his sister would sometimes make him thoughtful in the midst of dissipation, but he was laughed at by his gay companions and suffered to be melancholy no more.

His pride was hurt at the behaviour of lord Albourn; yet he knew he merited it; and his love for lady Caroline still drew him to a house where he was received by its owner with little cordiality and politeness.

Nor did count D'Ollifont's attention to his sister altogether pass his notice:—his natural jealousy made him believe she really liked his addresses, and he instantly mistook common civility for returned affection.

His hatred against the count was the same, yet he had seldom time to think of it:—but he now resolved to give Matilda her aunt's manuscript, let the uneasiness it might occasion her, be ever so distressing: she was accordingly told, a few days after, that her brother's servant requested to speak with her; she was glad of this opportunity to see Leonard alone; having wished much to question him concerning Alfred's manner of living: and though she felt herself hurt at causing the man to betray his master's

CHAP. XVII.

REFLECTION.

*The thoughts of glory past, the present shame,
A thousand griefs shall waken at the name.*

POPE'S HOMER.

THERE are a number of vicious and licentious vices, which will so far triumph over human nature, as to seduce those from a track of virtue, that for years have been respected as valuable members of society.—Yet we see few but what, at some time or other, feel the most severe pangs from remorse of conscience, and a retrospect of the fair character they once held in the world; contrasted with the scorn and slighting treatment they are necessitated to suffer from many, who, at an early part of life, would have been proud of their esteem, yet have lived to behold their superiors reduced to the lowest state of penury and distress.

Reflection is never more poignant than when happy scenes, once enjoyed, are compared with the misery of a present state,—which misery has been occasioned by neglect, indolence, or extravagance.—The most abandoned experience moments, when acute feelings assail them with redoubled force; yet these feelings in some measure serve only to harden them in their crimes, and drive them to acts of desperation.—On others they take different effect; repentance,

repentance, and shame for what is past, urge them to amend for the future; give them strength and inclination to disentangle themselves from those embarrassments they are plunged into, and make them more cautious and wary through the remainder of life.

Alfred, at serious intervals, was nearly distracted with the idea of his own conduct; yet he had no power to reform: those resolutions of amendment, made in a morning, were thought of no more when the gambling hour approached; his care for the welfare of his sister would sometimes make him thoughtful in the midst of dissipation, but he was laughed at by his gay companions and suffered to be melancholy no more.

His pride was hurt at the behaviour of lord Albourn; yet he knew he merited it; and his love for lady Caroline still drew him to a house where he was received by its owner with little cordiality and politeness.

Nor did count D'Ollifont's attention to his sister altogether pass his notice:—his natural jealousy made him believe she really liked his addresses, and he instantly mistook common civility for returned affection.

His hatred against the count was the same, yet he had seldom time to think of it:—but he now resolved to give Matilda her aunt's manuscript, let the uneasiness it might occasion her, be ever so distressing: she was accordingly told, a few days after, that her brother's servant requested to speak with her; she was glad of this opportunity to see Leonard alone; having wished much to question him concerning Alfred's manner of living: and though she felt herself hurt at causing the man to betray his master's

master's affairs, yet she knew it to be an expedient absolutely necessary under their present circumstances.

The poor fellow's countenance clearly told all was not right; Matilda was shocked at his appearance; she had seen him but once since he moved with his master to Bond-street; and the visible change in his person plainly discovered the effects of irregular hours.

He delivered to her the paper sealed up;—and, after inquiring her health, and telling her he was sorry he had troubled her, but that he was ordered to deliver it into her own hands, he would have departed:—Matilda stopped him, and begged to know if he had been ill.

The tear almost started from his eyes.—“No, madam, I thank you”—was all he could answer.

“For heaven's sake, Leonard,” continued Matilda, deeply affected with this mark of his attachment, “tell me from whence this uneasiness proceeds; I am sure you are not well:—perhaps my brother's house does not suit your constitution.

Leonard seemed hurt that he had gone so far, and, after stammering an excuse, would again have withdrawn; but she insisted on his sitting down, and ordered some refreshment:—that was however useless; his appetite was gone, and he seemed in the last stage of a consumption.—She then implored him by the love he bore her family, and by the regard he had for his master and herself, to inform her of every circumstance relative to his affairs:—“for I am certain,” continued Matilda, “they are in a disagreeable situation; the expensive manner in which he lives, added to his
fondness

fondness for play, confirms those reports which have been hinted to me by many, whom I know to be well acquainted with his proceedings.

The man seemed struck with astonishment at her knowledge of those circumstances he had dreaded to communicate to her; and confessed by the appearance and behaviour of his master, the worst might be expected;—that the hours he kept were unreasonable, and that his manner often shewed him to be distracted. He also told her, he knew he had drawn on monsieur La Mecie several times; “in short, my dear lady,” continued Leonard, “he is quite an altered man; and he sometimes returns home in a morning, after I have been sitting up for him all night, in such ill-temper, that it cuts me to the heart.”

Matilda found herself incapable of bearing this interview any longer with fortitude; she therefore dismissed the faithful servant, with repeated assurances of her esteem for him, and a request that if any other circumstances should arise concerning her brother, he would immediately repair to Grosvenor-square, and relate them to her. She directly retired to her chamber, and broke open the letter: signora Maserini's manuscript dropped from the cover, on which Alfred had wrote a few lines. He concluded with saying he could plainly perceive by her manner, she had an attachment for Count D'Ollifont, which gave him the greatest uneasiness; and though he had hitherto kept the inclosed from her sight, through motives of tenderness, yet the common force of nature urged him to take every method in his power to prevent her forming a wretched alliance with a villain, the supposed murderer of their father.

The

The paper fell from her hand, and she fainted in the chair.—Miss Peviquil at that moment opened the door:—she was astonished to see Matilda in a fit, but immediately rang the bell. A servant attended: water and hartshorn were procured, and she recovered in a short time; both papers lay on the floor, but fortunately were not observed by either of the servants or Miss Peviquil, during their attendance on their fair patient; but, at the beginning of her recovery, they were taken up by her own woman, who was going to deliver them to her lady, not thinking Matilda able to take them:—yet her ideas were not so deranged but a recollection of their contents struck her with the impropriety of their being seen by the family; she therefore exerted her utmost strength, and, though not able to speak, snatched them from the girl's hand, and hurried them into her pocket with the utmost precipitation.

Miss Peviquil felt herself hurt at the disappointment her curiosity suffered by not seeing the letters which had caused such violent emotion in her friend: she directly suspected it to be a love affair, and maliciously determined to be revenged on her, by relating the whole story in company:—with these charitable resolutions she took leave, requesting to see her in the drawing-room, as Mr. Milverne and some other gentlemen had paid them a morning visit, and were inquiring after her health.—Matilda returned her many thanks for her care and attention, and promised to join them in a few minutes.

Mr. Milverne had been a constant attendant at sir Peter's, since his first introduction at the ball:—his particular politeness to Matilda plainly

plainly told she was the chief magnet which drew him to the house ; and though lady Peviquil was not by any means pleased with this information, which was first hinted to her by her daughter, yet she knew not how to dismiss from her parties a young gentleman of high birth, noble character, and elegant accomplishments.—Their only hope was that he could not possibly entertain any serious ideas of an honourable connection, without his father's consent ;—which consent they were partly certain would never be granted, on account of the old gentleman's avaricious disposition.

Every one expressed their concern at the languid appearance of Matilda, when she entered the room :—she excused herself by her having been rather indisposed that morning.

“ Pardon me, miss Maserini,” returned Mr. Milverne, “ your health seems on the decline : and though I do not mean to alarm you, yet I think the country absolutely necessary to restore that bloom to your countenance, which, through fine feelings, has too often vanished at the entrance of a sympathetic tear occasioned by a tale of woe, or a recital of the misfortunes of others.

Both lady Peviquil and her daughter smiled with contempt.—Matilda thanked him, and said, she shortly intended to leave England, as she did not find the climate agree with her constitution.

He changed colour instantly ;—his surprise and emotion was visible to all.—“ To leave England, madam !” he replied.—Having recollected himself, he in a more composed manner asked her, if her resolution to that purpose was not very suddenly taken.

Miss

Miss Peviquil considered this would be a fit opportunity to exercise her ill-nature, which was greatly heightened by Mr. Milverne's behaviour to Matilda, on the circumstance of the letter; and immediately answered to that gentleman's question, by significant hints, that it was a disorder in the heart, which was extremely difficult to be cured:—she then, with the utmost irony and malice, related the affair in the most ridiculous terms, and concluded with a request to know the name of her admirer.

Mr. Milverne seemed petrified:—Matilda was struck with astonishment at her conversation; the insulting and malicious wit of Miss Peviquil was more than she could support:—nor had she power to utter a word, but burst into a flood of tears. Her brother at that moment was announced, and entered the drawing-room.

The embarrassment of the whole party was general:—the gentlemen, who, except Mr. Milverne, were chiefly strangers, testified their approbation of Miss Peviquil's recital by laughing; but the idea that their mirth had drawn tears from a beautiful young woman, cast a gloom on their countenance, and gave them no very favourable opinion of her whose satirical talents had so much entertained them.

CHAP. XVIII.

ALFRED Maferini was going to pay the compliments of the morning with more than usual gaiety, when the sight of Matilda, striving to conceal her tears, struck his eyes; her manner and peculiar situation prevented his utterance.—Reflection darted on his memory, and his late ill-treatment of her appeared in the most black and villanous colours:—he had been insulted, he could perceive;—friendless and unprotected, she had no one to take her part:—their mother had always recommended Matilda to his care:—how had he fulfilled her request?—by cruel indifference, when she was surrounded with seducers, danger, and dissipation:—in short, every part of his behaviour, since their residence in London, presented itself in the most shameful light, and the ideas of his own baseness kept him motionless some time.

The silence was not broken, till he himself, with the utmost tenderness, asked his sister the cause of her tears.—She found he was hurt; and the recollection of his former kindness, contrasted with his present conduct, threw her into another agony of weeping.

He immediately turned, and, with the greatest indignation in his looks, asked an explanation of his sister's uneasiness, which he said he supposed was occasioned by some affront she was unable to resent.—“If so,” continued Alfred,

“I am arrived here in proper time, to afford

VOL. I.

F

that

that protection which by duty I am bound, and by inclination I am most willing to give."

Mr. Milverne was the only gentleman he had any knowledge of in the room; he had noticed that he in general paid particular attention to Matilda; his wild imagination instantly took fire, and whispered him he was the person who should answer for the injury. No sooner had this thought suggested itself, than, in a resolute tone, he insisted on his resolving the question.

Mr. Milverne started from a reverie, which the late conversation had thrown him into, and, with a manly composure, addressed the distracted Alfred:—"Most willingly, sir! My carriage is at the door:—if you will favour me with your company round the Park, I will inform you of the whole affair; and permit me to say, sir, had miss Maserini's brother been always as anxious after her welfare and happiness, there would have been no cause for him to have requested information, or my assistance to have given it."

This just reproach struck the young Frenchman to the heart; he frowned, and they left the room together.

The gentlemen who remained soon after took their leave.—Matilda found herself alone with lady Peviquil and her daughter.—The situation was distressing; but she was soon relieved from it, as both retired to their dressing rooms; the latter making an awkward apology for the unhappiness she had occasioned.

Mr. Milverne in the most friendly terms informed Alfred of the cruel treatment his sister had received, not only that morning, but at many other times, when he himself had in the same manner been witness to it.—He conjured him

him to remove her from fir Peter Peviquil's,—reminded him it was a house of dissipation, pride, and luxury,—begged him to consider how dangerous many parts of the company were to a young lady but newly entered into the gaieties of life:—he even hinted his suspicions of Harry Peviquil, and count D'Ollifont.—This name touched Alfred to the soul—he made no answer, but heaved a convulsive sigh.

Mr. Milverne still continued: “My attention to your sister has, I own, Mr. Maserini, been particular; and I now in your presence avow that I love her,—love her to distraction.”

“Why not then, sir,” returned Alfred,—“avow it to the world, and openly address her as a man of honour? Not, sir, that I wish for your alliance with her, more than that of any other gentleman;—yet I conceive, when sentiments of love and attachment are declared for a young woman, they sound not with propriety till sanctioned by the open behaviour of an intended husband.”

“And that, sir,” replied Mr. Milverne, “should before now have been exemplified in me, had it not been for a whimsical father whose consent I must, if possible, obtain, for the sake of us both:—if this can be done, I shall be happy to make her my wife, and think myself blessed in the possession of such a treasure.”

Alfred still remained thoughtful;—reflections crowded on his mind, and they were almost too much for his senses.—Henry Peviquil, he was now informed, wore a mask of friendship to cover his villany: he had more than once thought ill of him, in his transactions at St. James's-street; yet he was a young man of the

first fashion, the son of a person of distinction. —But were these idle pompous ornaments to make amends for the ruin of his sister, the disgrace of his family, the curse of himself?—That sister delivered to his care by a fond mother,—that sister whom he was bound to protect by every tie of blood, love, and honour, —that sister, who herself foresaw danger, and wished to escape it, but was prevented by him, —that sister, whose regard for him he knew to be sincere,—that sister, who had been insulted, yet had no one to defend her, but those who, under motives of charity, would expect a reward that must at once crush her to the lowest state of human nature!—"Accursed idea!" exclaimed he, in a voice hardly articulate, pulled the check-string, and desired the coachman to stop.

There was a wildness in his look, which alarmed Mr. Milverne. "You are not going to leave me, Mr. Maserini?" said he: "I intended to ask you to take a friendly dinner with me."

"I thank you, sir," returned Alfred, "but must beg to be excused."—He leaped from the carriage, and darted across the Park towards Piccadilly.

He had arrived at the turnpike-gate when Lord Albourn's post chariot drove through. Alfred just perceived his lordship and his daughter were in it.—The young lady's eyes met his at the same moment;—they both bowed;—but her father did not observe him.—He stopped the servant, who was on horseback paying the toll, and asked if his lordship was going a little excursion from London.

"He

"He is going beyond a little excursion, sir," replied the man,— "many miles from hence."

Alfred was struck with astonishment.— "Many miles!" returned he: "why, lady Caroline never informed me of it, although I saw her yesterday."

"Her ladyship," said the man, "did not know of it herself two hours before we set off, as it was a sudden whim of lord Albourn's."

The servant seemed in a hurry to overtake the chariot, which had got some little distance;—but Alfred still detained him, to inquire what place they were going to, and when they were to return.

The man answered, "He really could not tell to what part they were going; but the distance was near two hundred miles from town;—that his lord returned in a week, but that lady Caroline was to be left behind."—He then spurred his horse, and left his hearer in a state little better than stupefaction.

That lord Albourn had taken his daughter from London, merely to avoid any further intimacy with him, was certain; in short, the occurrences of the morning had overwhelmed him with despair, and he found himself at his own lodgings, before his recollection had reminded him he was going that way. Leonard opened the door; this faithful servant plainly saw the agitation of his spirits.—Alfred strove to disguise his uneasiness, and asked, with some degree of composure, if any person had called since he left home? Leonard answered, "No one, except a mean-looking man, who had left a note for him, which lay in his dressing-room."—He immediately repaired to

it, and read the contents; it was from his aylor, requesting the payment of seventy pounds on the next day,—and, if disappointed, threatened an arrest.—He had, a week before, drawn upon his banker in France, for the last three hundred pounds of his fortune;—~~this~~ would not even pay his debts. Ruin and confusion seemed to encircle him: where was now his pride—his honour—his character as a gentleman and a soldier? Where was his love for his sister?—In what manner was he to make good his word, of adding a part of his fortune to hers?—If he remained in England, disgrace and infamy must surround him;—nor could he fly, but like a mean and beggarly outcast of society, leaving behind him the name of a swindler and a villain. Even in his own country, he must meet the reproaches of those to whom he used to preach lessons of morality, and by example enforced his doctrine. Matilda too,—what was to become of her?—Her fortune would not support her.—“Must she,” said he, “through my faults and follies, sink with me into destruction?—Who is to protect her when I am in jail?—That villain, count D’Ollifont, whom I suspect to be the murderer of my father, may seize on the moment to complete his accursed intentions, and, like the fiend of hell, laugh at those his mischief has hurled head-long into irremediable ruin. It is too much,” exclaimed, he, running to a part of the room where his sword hung: his despair overcame him;—he drew the blade from the scabbard in a kind of triumph, and uttered, in a voice of phrenzy, “Now I defy them all; even hell itself is better than what may come to-morrow.”

The

The glittering steel trembled in his hand;—his arm was in the very motion to strike his heart, when he found it with-held by a person behind him.—He turned, gasping with convulsive madnets; the good old Leonard dropped before him on his knees:—“Merciful father,” exclaimed he, “look on him with an eye of pity!”—then turning to Alfred with stern aspect,—“is this, sir,” said he, “a time to appear before that God, to whom you have so much to answer for, and from whom so little to expect?—Look, sir, in the mirror before you; and consider if your figure is in a proper state for a dying man;—your countenance convulsed and agitated,—your senses in a state of distraction,—the sword of your departed father lifted in your hand ready to supersede the power of your God, by putting an end to that existence he gave you, and consequently has alone a right to extinguish.”

The sword dropped from his hand; he sunk into a chair, and felt severely the just reproaches of his servant.—“I thank you, Leonard,” was all he could say; but he made a motion to be alone. Leonard first secured the weapon, and then left him to meditate on his rashness.

He continued for some time in a state of stupid insensibility, but by degrees recovered, and shuddered at the danger he had escaped. His resolution was fixed, never more to game; he swore by the most solemn oath, never to play but for a trifling sum, nor any more to hazard himself at a place where, to his cost, he had experienced the villany of mankind under the mask of friendship and kindness.—With these resolutions Alfred staid at home the remainder of the day, thanked Leonard again for his care, and

retired to rest with more composure and satisfaction than he had for months before.

Matilda was overpowered with misfortunes. The account of her father's disappearance, and the suspicion which rested on the count, whom she had before disliked, but now even shuddered at his name, sunk her into new troubles and distress. The insults she had received from miss Peviquil, although they had confirmed her in the idea of possessing the esteem if not the love of Mr. Milverne, entirely settled her determination of leaving England. To accomplish this, she resolved to demand of her brother a small part of her fortune, to carry her over to France; and, immediately on her arrival in that country, to enter a convent, and totally seclude herself from a world, where, young as she was, she could plainly perceive the interested and sordid views of mankind; and sickened at those gaities of high life she once languished to enjoy.

CHAP. XIX.

THE MASQUERADE.

*To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,
To raise the genius and to mend the heart;
To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,
Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold.*

POPE.

WHY was superior strength, fortitude, and courage, given to man?—Why does he naturally inherit these blessings in a greater degree than woman?

woman? To protect the weak and defenceless from the gripe and cruelty of the wicked—to give succour to those who in their nature are less capable of bearing up against imposition; and who consequently require that aid, which, according to the laws of christianity, he is bound to afford them.

Who is the cause of this horrid downfall to infamy and shame?—Man! he who in the book of nature was ordained to bear the image of the Supreme Being, and created to take on him the godlike office of protector to the female part of the world; yet doth he blunt his feelings against every trait of humanity, and dares destroy that which the Almighty intended he should preserve. Of this description there are many:—but it is to be hoped they are greatly overbalanced by the more noble and generous part of mankind, who equally feel the effects of beauty, yet scorn to gratify their passions by villanous and deliberate schemes of seduction.

Count D'Ollifont was struck with Matilda's charms, the first evening he was at sir Peter's; and, in the few minutes' interval between seeing her and being introduced, he settled within his own mind, if possible, to seduce her.

The count was a man who experienced no disturbance from the intrusion of honour, conscience, or feeling: the milk of human kindness was not in any respect concerned, in softening his composition:—the tear of compassion was never seen in his eye, nor could the most dismal tale or even sight of woe procure from him an accent of pity, or even a sympathetic sigh. The gratification of his passions was his whole concern; nor did he stop at any thing, to accomplish what his wishes prompted him to possess. He

now enjoyed the whole estates and large fortune of count Maserini, grandfather to Alfred and Matilda; he could therefore well afford to live in the most splendid and elegant manner. On riches he chiefly depended to succeed with the ladies; as he knew his age would almost give him the title of an elderly man.

He had just planned in what manner to make his attack on the beautiful young foreigner, when sir Peter Peviquil, as was before related, led him up, and introduced her under the name of Maserini. The picture of her father plainly confirmed who she was. A sudden horror overcame him; he felt a something strike his heart, which he had heard described as the touch of remorse; he, however, soon recovered, and resumed his natural gaiety and politeness. Yet the behaviour of Alfred did not go unnoticed by him; and it seemed as if he had actually known those intentions the former had been weighing in his mind five minutes before.

Rest forsook the pillow of the count that night; his ideas of seduction received a check at the mention of the name; yet every circumstance coincided with his wishes, except her brother:—him he feared. Mean and dastardly in his disposition, he was fearful even as a child, and would shrink like a wretched reptile from the just revenge of a man whom he had cringed to with meanness, for the purpose of destroying his happiness, and ruining his family.

He resolved not to be too hasty in the affair, but in every respect to make himself agreeable to Matilda, and wait for an opportunity, when, by some means or other, Alfred should be unable to afford that protection his sister would require.

That

That opportunity was now arrived; the tailor, who had threatened in a letter to arrest him, was the same that made the count's clothes; it was he who first persuaded the man to take that method; supposing, that, not being able in so little a time to procure bail, he must be confined at least for one night, and during that time he could by force (finding that none of his persuasive eloquence had any effect on Matilda) convey her to some secret spot, where he might, unmolested, take advantage of her situation.

This diabolical scheme was, accordingly, with the greatest deliberation, put into execution; and the tailor informed the count in the evening, that he had not received his money; the latter then ordered the man, on pain of his displeasure, and entire loss of his custom, not to fail to put his threats in practice. To add greater force to this request, he presented him with a ten pound bank-note, over and above the bill he then paid him; and received a solemn promise in return, that his wishes should be accomplished with the greatest exactness.

Count D'Ollifont then proceeded to sir Peter Peviquil's;—he plainly perceived there had been a misunderstanding between the ladies; but it did not in any respect alter his plan.

He presented the family with tickets for a grand masquerade, which was to be at the Pantheon the next evening, and also begged Mr. Milverne's acceptance of one, who entered the room soon after him.

Matilda at first declined going; but the count would take no refusal.—She seemed particularly cool in her behaviour towards him; but this

did not in any respect damp his spirits in the plot he had undertaken.

In the course of conversation, he hinted that he should like Mr. Maserini to be of the party, and pretended he should likewise send him a ticket the following morning.—He gave them to understand the manager of it was patronised by himself, and consequently he should exert his interest as much as possible in his behalf.

The count, Mr. Milverne, and Henry Peviquil, escorted the ladies to a concert:—they returned to supper.—Mr. Milverne seemed unhappy,—Matilda extremely dejected.—She inquired how he left her brother;—he did not wish to relate to her the manner in which Alfred flew from the carriage; but turned the conversation by saying, “He could not persuade him to take a dinner,”—She would have continued, but was interrupted by the count’s asking in what characters they intended to appear.—Matilda and Mr. Milverne resolved to go in dominos; Henry Peviquil declared he should assume the character of Don Quixote; sir Peter, a hermit; her ladyship, a nun; and miss Peviquil, a gipsy. The count said he did not think himself able to support a character, and therefore should follow the example of his fair cousin, as he was pleased to style her, and appear in no particular dress. About one o’clock he took his leave, and promised to be with them the next evening. Mr. Milverne likewise appointed to call in Grosvenor-square at the same hour.

Matilda retired to her chamber, but not to sleep;—she disliked even the sight of count D’Ollifont; yet she had consented to be conducted by him to a masquerade.—It was an entertainment

tainment she had much wished to see; but had heard of its being a dangerous scene of amusement.—She however resolved, if possible, to persuade her brother to accompany them, and for once be the cause of spending a dissipated evening: she should then consider herself safe in his presence, and have greater enjoyment of the entertainment.

Alfred Maserini arose in the morning, more composed than he had been for many weeks; having already resolved, immediately on receiving the sum he expected from M. Le Mercier, to discharge his debts, and retire with his sister to France.—He sat down to breakfast, again thanked Leonard for his care, and told him of the alteration in his sentiments; he observed on the table a letter directed to him; having asked from whom it came, he was informed a man brought it early in the morning, and said it required no answer:—the contents of it were as follow:

“ TO MR. MASERINI.

“ STRANGE as an anonymous letter may seem under the present circumstances, yet I conjure you, for the sake of your own happiness and the honour of your sister, to obey the dictates it contains. Count D'Ollifont has engaged sir Peter Peviquil's family to a masquerade this evening at the Pantheon; and it is his intention in the course of the night to convey miss Maserini, by treachery, to a house he has provided in the country for his purpose; where he will take every advantage of her situation;

situation. He is also determined to deprive her of your protection, by keeping you away; which scheme he has planned with the tailor who sent to you for money yesterday. The man will call this morning, and arrest you if the bill is not discharged.—Be not offended at seeing the inclosed hundred pound bank-note, as you may not immediately be able to procure the sum:—pay him, and, if possible, persuade him to keep the knowledge of it from the count.—I have also sent you a ticket for the masquerade;—fail not to be there; but by no means discover yourself to the party, whom you will recognise in the characters of a hermit, a nun, a gipsy, and Don Quixote.—Among them will be three dominos, which are the disguises of your sister, Mr. Milverne, and the count; watch diligently the latter, whom you will observe draw the young lady to a private room, and then by force take her to a carriage that is to wait at the back-door of the building. I leave the rest to you. Fail not to follow minutely this letter, as you value your peace of mind for ever.

“ A FRIEND.”

Alfred's astonishment at reading this extraordinary epistle, may well be conceived. He showed it to Leonard, and asked his advice; the old man begged him to attend to its contents:—“ No one, sir,” said he, “ could have an interest in writing such a letter; and the bank-note fully confirms it to be no idle frolic.—His ideas were the same as his master's, and they determined to execute implicitly the
directions

directions given. The receiving of the money hurt him; but it was absolutely necessary to discharge the debt, as he had none of his own, till that he had sent for arrived: he, however, resolved to find out, if possible, the person, and repay him with every acknowledgment, if the suspicions were well grounded.

Alfred determined, in the first place, not to see his sister, and gave Leonard orders, if any of the servants should come from Grosvenor-square, to send word back he was not at home.

About eleven o'clock, the tailor arrived, was introduced, and received his money.—The man was astonished. Alfred insisted on his taking a glass of wine, and made him a present for the trouble he had caused.—He then related to him the scheme which he had heard was to be put in practice by the count and himself.

Surprise, guilt, and consternation, stopped the tailor's utterance:—he believed it must be some supernatural power that had informed him of it. Alfred argued with him for some time, explained the villany of such proceedings, and the ruin that might have ensued. In short, he worked so much on the poor fellow's feelings, that he fell at his feet, asked ten thousand pardons, and begged to know if he could in any respect serve him, to recompense the injury he had intended to commit.

Alfred took him at his word, and informed him that the only way to make reparation, would be, to go immediately to the count, and say that every circumstance had succeeded to his wishes, for that Mr. Maserini was in close confinement. The man promised to be punctual

tual in the message, and, after again thanking him for his generosity, departed,

As it was expected, a servant called from sir Peter's, to say that miss Maserini wished much to see her brother, Leonard told him he was just gone out.

Alfred then sent to procure his dress with as much secrecy as possible: it was a plain domino, that he might not be observed.

In the course of the afternoon, the servant from Grosvenor-square arrived a second time; but was answered as before, that Mr. Maserini was not yet returned; he left a note from his sister, and desired it might be given him as soon as he came home. Alfred opened it: Matilda informed him how much against her inclination it was to accompany the count to a masquerade; yet she could not decline the invitation without absolute rudeness. She requested her brother would be there, and concluded with saying, she supposed he had also received a ticket.

He resolved to take no notice of the letter, but, as the anonymous epistle desired (the contents of which he had now every reason to believe authentic), to go himself, unknown to every one. He panted for the moment when he should detect the villain in the very act of injustice and cruelty he had long suspected him to be guilty of; and crush that monster to the earth, who dared attempt the honour of his family.

The wished-for hour of twelve was announced; when, having placed in his pocket a brace of pistols, he threw himself into a hackney coach, and ordered the coachman to drive, to the Pantheon.

CHAP.

CHAP. XX.

ALFRED ordered the coachman, when he stopped at the front doors in Oxford-road, to drive round and wait for him at the back entrance.

The Pantheon was crowded; the company were numerous and elegant; every one looked happy and pleased with each other.—“I,” said Alfred, “am the only person who seem unsociable and alone. Several characters passed, which he knew by their voices; but he could no-where trace those he wished to recognise; when on a sudden a group of bacchanals rushed by him, and among them he observed Don Quixote. Having addressed the figure in a feigned voice, by inquiring after his Dulcinea del Toboso, he immediately received a witty answer from a tongue which plainly confirmed it to be Henry Peviquil.

He now judged the rest of the party must be in the rooms, and accordingly continued his search.

In about a quarter of an hour he perceived the knight join his company; they were dressed exactly as the letter had described, except that he could observe only two dominos, which he found were his sister and the count;—but soon after heard them speak, as if they were surprised at not seeing Mr. Milverne.

At supper the greater part of the company unmasked, and Alfred was confirmed that his conjectures on each of the characters were right.—He still continued disguised, with his
eye

eye fixed on them :—and it gave pleasure to see Matilda treat the count with the utmost coolness :—but yet he thought he could perceive, in the countenance of the latter, a malicious smile, occasioned by the hope of having her shortly in his power.—These ideas made him redouble his vigilance ; and he directly after the repast joined them almost close, but strove as much as possible to escape notice.

Henry Peviquil and his father seemed heated by the wine they had drank ;—Miss Peviquil was chiefly taken up in gallanting with a gambling friend of her brother's ; and her ladyship in paying compliments to her fashionable acquaintance.—Count D'Ollifont attended to none but his fair relation ;—and the inattention she received from the others, gave him an opportunity of continuing his politeness.—Alfred remarked a magician who followed also the steps of the count ;—his dress was truly conformable to the part he performed, and he held in one hand a wand, the emblem of his power.—This figure gave him some chagrin, and he resolved to address it, by asking him in what manner he made use of his art :—the magician answered, in a voice which he thought he had somewhere heard, “ That he punished the guilty, and gave succour to the innocent.—I know you, young man,” said he : “ and you are in a noble cause ; be cautious how you execute it.”

Alfred was staggered at this reply, but yet thought they might be words of chance, and begged an explanation of the incoherent sentence. The magician said, he would convince him of his knowledge ; and immediately wrote on a card the following words.—“ Your
name

name is Maserini,—your business at this place is to protect the honour of your family in the person of your sister :—the time draws near :—be diligent, and fail not.”

By the time he had read these few words, the magician was gone ; and the astonished Alfred stood for some time motionless :—he seemed in a dream, and could hardly believe his senses ; yet he supposed this stranger must be the person who had sent him the letter. The count and his sister were nearly out of sight at a different part of the Rotunda, but he quickly made up to them ;—their party had entirely dispersed, and Matilda seemed extremely uneasy. The former in vain strove to give her comfort ; she could hardly conceal her tears. It was about three o'clock, the time fixed for the horrid scheme, when Alfred observed the count draw his sister to another room, under the idea of seeking their friends.—He followed, and heard him inform her that he had been just told they waited for them in their carriages at the back entrance. He led her to the door ; that being a place for chairs only, there were no coaches near.—The count conducted Matilda down the street, and turned into a part where there was a chariot and one hackney-coach waiting at a little distance.

Matilda, seeing no one in the carriage, refused to enter it : the count entreated, but she still continued obstinate, and seemed extremely alarmed. They were not within hearing of any person but the hackney coachman and another man who stood with him.—Alfred gasped for breath ; his very soul was convulsed with rage.—Count D'Ollifont with some vehemence again insisted on her complying with his request :

request:—she answered, she would die first, and burst into a flood of tears:—he then began to force her into the carriage.

“Your brother, now, madam,” said the count, “is not here to encourage your pride, or frustrate my wishes.”—She screamed, and fainted.

“Damnable villain!” exclaimed Alfred:—“know thou art mistaken:—for you now behold him ready to protect the honour of his house, by crushing to the earth that wretch who dare seduce his sister.”

While he uttered these words, Matilda remained in the arms of one of the count’s servants, insensible.—Leonard, who had dreaded his master’s violence of temper by the pistols he had taken in his pockets, determined to be near at the time, to assist his young lady;—he accordingly waited with a hackney coach, the same that stood near the count’s chariot.—He immediately ran to the assistance of Matilda, forced her from the footman, and placed her in the vehicle he had hired.

During this time Count D’Ollifont was struck motionless: he could hardly believe himself awake; but the figure of the enraged Frenchman, who had now unmasked, plainly confirmed the truth.

“I was only,” said he with a smile, “going to conduct your sister to sir Peter’s.”

“Liar! villain!” exclaimed Alfred, “thou wast going to take her to a place where, unprotected, she must have sunk beneath thy diabolical intentions:—nay more,” continued he, in a low voice, “I strongly suspect thee to be the murderer of her father.”

He

He started, stood 'about a minute in a thoughtful posture, and then uttered with a curse,—“ Desperate causes require desperate remedies !”—pulled a pistol from his side pocket, and fired at his adversary :—owing to his agitation, the ball passed, and Alfred remained unhurt :—but instantly he discharged one at the count, who fell, and every spark of life seemed extinguished.—The coachman and footman cried their master was murdered, and instantly secured the young foreigner, who made no resistance, but seemed buried in a rêverie ; till the magician, whom he had noticed in the rooms, came up.

“ I see,” said he, “ there has been bloody work here ;—but punishment has fallen on the right person.”—He unmasked, and discovered the features of Mr. Milverne.

The men still kept their hold of Alfred : but no crowd had assembled, as they were some distance from the doors, and in a private street.—Mr. Milverne took the part of his friend, soon disengaged him from confinement, and with the assistance of Leonard, who had by this time made himself known, forced him to the coach.—They promised the man a large reward, if he would drive as fast as possible towards the first stage to Dover.

The horses, which had not been out in the day, travelled with the utmost speed ;—and the driver, in hopes of the money, failed not to exert his abilities in keeping up their pace, inasmuch that he brought them to an inn at Dartford by eight in the morning.

During the time of their journey, Matilda learnt from her brother the whole affair, and plainly perceived they must be plunged into
new

new difficulties in consequence of the count's death.

Mr. Milverne might be suspected as the cause of it; and the idea that she should never see him more, added new pangs to those she already experienced.

Leonard informed them, when they had got some distance from town, that a packet from France had been received by the people of the house where they lodged; who had neglected to give it till after his master had set off to the masquerade:—he therefore having no place to put it under lock and key, determined to bring it in his pocket.

This was a fortunate circumstance, as the direction confirmed it to come from M. Le Mercier: on opening it Alfred received the money he had wrote for; it gave them some comfort, as it would support them with economy for some time. But this was of little consequence when he considered his life must be sacrificed as soon as the count's death was made known in France; his interest being so great at court, as to prevent any defence from saving the person who had deprived him of his existence.

He determined, however, rather to die than cowardly shrink from justice, and disgrace the name of a foldier.—He related to his sister his resolution; but she conjured him not to risk his life, from a punctilio of honour.

“You are engaged in a just cause,” continued Matilda, “and need not be ashamed of your conduct being known to the world.” She used many other arguments, and asked him, “To whom she was to look for protection, when he was no more.”

“To

“To God,” he exclaimed; “for among mankind all honour is lost.—I am sick of the world, Matilda,—and care not how soon I leave it.”—“Surely,” said she, “that fortitude, courage, and patience, which were the leading traits in your character, and which used to charm our departed mother, are vanished:—have you no desire to see Grasville Abbey?”—The name struck him to the heart.—“Who can tell but it is ordained for you to unravel that mystery which has so long hung over our family, and been the ruin of our house?—But heaven forbid, Alfred, that I should persuade you to act contrary to that honour which for years has been the boast of our forefathers:—if, therefore, you resolve to make yourself known in France, I will cheerfully enter a convent, and take leave of a world in which I have little happiness to expect.”—Here she sighed deeply; her heart reminded her that the image of Mr. Milverne would often intrude amid those religious duties she would then be bound to perform.

Alfred continued silent:—his curiosity to see the residence of his ancestors, the hopes of finding some clue to the mystic disappearance of his father,—urged him to adopt the plans his sister had proposed; but his honour,—his character as an officer and a man, forbade him.

Every mile he found himself farther from London, his perplexity increased; nor was his determination by any means fixed, when the coach drove up to the principal inn at Dartford.

—Alfred handsomely rewarded the man, desired him to say nothing concerning the business he had been witness to, but give feigned answers to those who should wonder at seeing a hack so

far

far from London.—The coachman promised faithfully to obey his orders.—They each took some refreshment, hired post horses and set off again in less than an hour towards Dover.

Alfred during the journey informed his sister that his resolutions were fixed to join his regiment, and throw himself on the mercy of his countrymen. “I scorn,” said he, “to fly ignobly from a punishment I flatter myself I do not justly deserve.”

Matilda shed a flood of tears, but perfectly acquiesced in his wishes, and she strove to think no more of Mr. Milverne;—that was impossible, but yet she considered, the strict and awful ceremonies of a monastic life would, in a course of time, erase those thoughts from her bosom.—

Alfred in some respects was in a similar situation; his acquaintance with lady Caroline Albourne was first commenced in the midst of dissipation, yet he felt many pangs at the idea of losing her for ever. In his career of folly he had persuaded himself that he was no farther interested in the affair, than merely the idea of being intimate with a young lady of fashion, and having an opportunity of toasting a beautiful girl; but he now plainly perceived that he loved lady Caroline so far as to make his life uncomfortable without her.—There was also another cause for uneasiness; his debts in London were unpaid:—to the name of murderer, the appellation of swindler must be added:—a title he in some measure merited.

His silence plainly told the state of his mind; while his sister shed many tears at thoughts of their present misfortunes, and at the recollection of those happy hours she had experienced
under

under the care of maternal tenderness,—never, never to return.

Leonard shared the sorrows of them both ; yet he received some little comfort at the thoughts of returning to that country where he had spent the chief part of his life. They arrived rather late at Dover ; Leonard was directly dispatched to inquire what time the packet would sail, and brought word back, not till the following evening. This intelligence was extremely disagreeable to them ; as they might before that time be recognised, taken into custody, and conducted back to London. They were necessitated however to wait patiently the event ; but Alfred reflected, with some terror, on the horrors of a jail, in a strange country, and under the laws he was equally a stranger to. —Under these circumstances, they remained at the inn as private as possible.

About two hours before they intended to sail, a man arrived post from London ; he asked if any travellers were in that house, who intended going to France, and was answered in the affirmative. Leonard, who by chance overheard the conversation, ran to his master, and informed him of the affair ; each conjectured it to be an officer of justice, and Alfred waited with fortitude and composure the event ; when they were agreeably surprised, by seeing the inn-keeper introduce Mr. Milverne's valet.

He delivered a letter, the first sentence of which contained the following words :

“ Count D'Ollifont is not yet dead.”—

“ Thanks be to heaven !” exclaimed Alfred, and communicated the agreeable intelligence to his sister.

Mr. Milverne informed him, that he was kept in custody till late in the morning, when he procured bail ; being then taken before a magistrate, he explained the whole affair, and was honorably cleared.—He further informed him that the count's indisposition was very uncertain, and advised him by no means to remain in England, or make himself known in France, as count D'Ollifont had many friends in that country, who, immediately as they knew of the event, would, through particular interest at court, place him in the Bastile for life, even if the former should recover of his wound.

In the latter part of the letter he mentioned Matilda with the utmost tenderness, pitied her situation, and entreated Alfred by no means to run hazards, through false notions of honour, and leave his sister destitute of protection.—He concluded with saying, he thought they had better pass over as quick as possible to Italy, but requested he would send word what part they resolved to visit, as he himself hoped to join them in a few weeks.

Alfred wrote an answer, expressing his gratitude for the gentlemanlike and friendly treatment he had received ; informed him that he had at first resolved to throw himself on the laws of his country, although he knew them to be severe where a courtier or man of interest was concerned ;—but that his letter had entirely altered his resolutions, and that he now intended to travel as fast and privately as possible towards Italy :—that the hope of seeing him there, and making proper apologies for the strange behaviour he had been guilty of towards him, would in a great measure alleviate the disagreeable manner of his journey. He concluded

cluded with his sister's thanks for his kind inquiries, and the equal pleasure she would enjoy with himself, on seeing Mr. Milverne in a short interval of time.

This letter was given to the valet, and he set off immediately.—The vessel set sail a short time after, and Leonard informed his master, while they were crossing the channel, that he had learned from Mr. Milverne's servant, that the anonymous letter he had received was sent by that gentleman;—for that he, the valet, was employed by his master to draw the plan of proceedings from the count's confidential servant, whom he contrived to intoxicate with liquor, and then communicated to Mr. Milverne the intelligence he had received.

Alfred was vexed that Leonard did not inform him of this circumstance sooner, that he might have returned the money he received, and acknowledge the obligation.

Matilda was still more attached to him: she was happy in the change of sentiments which his letter had caused in her brother, and looked forward with a considerable degree of pleasure for the time when he should join them abroad.

After a pleasant voyage of a few hours, they found themselves landed in their native country—but in a far different situation from that they were in when they left it:—then they were honoured and respected by all, and afraid of meeting no one:—now they were under misfortunes and concealment, shrinking from the eyes of every beholder, like wretched outcasts of society, and terrified at being observed by every individual.

CHAP. XXI.

ADVENTURES.

*" Oh, Peace ! thou source and soul of social life,
 Beneath whose calm-inspiring influence
 Science her views enlarges, Art refines,
 And swelling Commerce opens all her ports ;
 Blest be the man divine who gives us thee !"*

THOMSON.

WHEN men of honour, whose principles and dispositions are naturally just, fall under misfortunes, and experience adversity and disappointment, their feelings suffer a far greater shock than can be felt by those who, from childhood, have been plunged in irregularities, and are well practised in the arts of meanness and deceit.

The sting of remorse seldom lasts longer than that punishment which they bring upon themselves through perpetual indiscretion and deliberate schemes of villainy ;—while the man who has been merely led away by example or youthful follies, receives with redoubled force that blow which stabs at once his character and reputation. Nor can he, though the clouds of despair, which encompassed him, may be succeeded by the sunshine of prosperity, think of disagreeable events at a former part of life, but with anguish and distress.

Of the numberless griefs and afflictions to which human nature is subject, poverty is held up

up as one of a considerable magnitude ; it generally procures contempt and ill-treatment from the haughty sons of wealth ; and the opinion of the world in general is by no means favourable to those who are not possessors of riches and affluence. These mistaken and shameful ideas are almost too predominant in every country ; and the child of misery receives great addition to his woes by the sneers and scandal of his neighbours. Equality, though a word of terror to the great, if taken in its true meaning, implies sentiments of the most noble and generous kind ; instead of pulling down laws, and levelling the whole class of mankind, it would confirm unity, peace, and good order.

The rod of oppression too often falls upon that man who is unable, through misfortunes or peculiar circumstances, to raise himself against the weight ; but, crushed by his power, he sinks beneath the force of injustice, and is lost to his God, his family, and himself ; whereas, in the time of his sorrows, had he received comfort, succour, or assistance, he might have continued to have proved a valuable member of society.

Alfred Maferini meditated with painful ideas on those distresses, which had happened, through his own misconduct, during the time they had been in England. He not only beheld himself surrounded with difficulties, but his sister, who was innocent of the cause, equally involved, through his errors and vices. Young, beautiful, and accomplished, she was but ill-calculated to undergo the hardships of life ; yet she submitted to them with resignation, and could even teach patience to him who had brought her to the present disquietude. This would cut him to

the soul; and the scalding tear of repentance would often start from his eye, in defiance of the many efforts he made to conceal it.

He was impetuous, proud, and courageous in his disposition; yet, in feelings he was a woman: nor was his pride of that nature to make him overlook affliction, although concealed in a hut of poverty and misery. But he laid too great a stress on the punctilios of honour and high birth; he valued the name he bore, with such ardour as to make him resent the least affront offered in the family to which it belonged.

Their arrival at Calais was attended with disagreeable and degrading circumstances, on account of their giving in their names, which were feigned ones, and the review of their baggage, which consisted of clothes and a few articles which Matilda had received from Mr. Milverne's valet; that gentleman having procured from sir Peter's what little goods she set a value on, and desired his servant to deliver them at Dover. Their travelling through France was in every respect extremely uncomfortable, and the difficulties they met with in consequence of their endeavouring to conceal themselves from vulgar curiosity, extremely distressing.

They had nearly arrived at the Alps, when they halted for the night at a small inn. The accommodation was very indifferent, and they were given to understand by the hostess that some English persons of distinction were then in the house, who took up the best rooms. They were therefore necessitated to put up with the inconvenience, and, after a scanty meal, retired to poor and desolate apartments. Both Alfred and Matilda, with Leonard, had, the last day's journey, rode on horses which the former purchased of a smuggler

smuggler at a low price, considering that it would be the cheapest and most secret way of travelling. Leonard saw the cattle safely placed in a barn some distance from the house; the stables being occupied by the horses and servants of the persons whom the landlady had mentioned: he then laid himself down on a small bed in one corner of the building.

Leonard had not been asleep above two hours, before he was awakened by a glare of light which darted right on his eyes through an opening on one side of the barn. He immediately started up, and looked out at the door, and perceived that the inn was in flames. He hurried on his clothes, and ran as fast as possible to the spot, in order to assist his master and young lady. By the time he got there, one part of the house was entirely burnt down, and the remainder surrounded with flames: he was happy however to see his master and Matilda safe; and the former delivered to him the trunks, which he took care to place in security.

A number of peasants were assembled round, and each seemed to bewail the situation of a young lady and her father, who slept in those rooms which were on fire; but no one dared to go to their assistance, as the whole fabric was expected to fall in a few minutes. Nor was the general conjectures wrong, for in a very little time the front gave way, and fell; which discovered the internal part of the two rooms. They could see nothing of the gentleman; it was therefore supposed that he was suffocated, and had fallen among the ruins at the back part; but the eyes of the spectators experienced a most horrid sight in the other apartment: a young lady was standing in the middle of the flames. The agony

such a situation must inspire, had made her insensible; her hands were clasped together, and her eyes lifted towards heaven. The people cried out to give her assistance; but none dared try the experiment, till Alfred, touched with compassion for the unfortunate female, sprang forward with a ladder, and placed it against the part of the building which was yet standing: he had ascended above half way, when the part where the ladder rested against broke from his weight; but he had rose far enough to perceive, to his astonishment, that it was lady Caroline Albourne.

At this sight, Alfred forgot all danger, and resolved to die or save her; he accordingly, when he found the steps fall from under him, clasped a post which supported the story, and with an amazing agility sprang on the tottering floor of the room. He took her in his arms, but found no ladder set for his descent; the people were afraid to come near, on account of the falling in of the building, which would bury them in the ruins. He called to them; but his cries were vain; till Leonard, who was returning from conducting Matilda to a house a little distance from the spot, seeing his master in such a situation, ran for the ladder; but it was too late, for Alfred felt the place on which he stood, must sink with them, before he could get to the ground by that method: he therefore, with remarkable intrepidity, jumped from the part with lady Caroline in his arms, and fell on a feather bed which by chance had been thrown out at the beginning of the fire.

They were immediately dragged some distance off, and in one minute after, the whole fabric fell to the ground.

The

The situation of the unfortunate lady Caroline may be better imagined than described; for even when she had recovered from the insensibility which the thoughts of her danger had caused, it was but to experience new misery. Her father, without doubt, was buried in the ruins; she had not yet seen her deliverer, nor knew of the heroic courage that had been exerted in her behalf; for, from the moment the front of her chamber fell, she saw nor heard no more till her recovery in the house to which she had been conveyed.—She was now attended by several persons, and her own woman servant, who had slept in the back room, and leapt from the window at the first alarm.—At this period, while all were bewailing the loss of lord Albourne, he entered the room, supported by two servants. Lady Caroline fainted, and afterwards fell into hysterics, occasioned by the joy of seeing her father, whom she considered as no more. He embraced her, and shed tears of paternal tenderness for the safety of his child.

His lordship, when awaked by the alarm of fire, knew it would be some time before he could enter his daughter's chamber, as she always bolted her door on the inside; and that the fright which so sudden an information might give her, would most likely prevent her from opening it at all; he therefore considered it would be best to get out at the back part as soon as possible, and fly to her assistance in the front.—With this idea, he attempted to descend the stair-case, but found it in flames:—this sight drove him' distracted.—Without waiting for help, he jumped from the window, and was so hurt by the fall, that he lay insensible

for some time ; when one of his servants found him in that situation, and conducted him to the house which was occupied by the other sufferers.

Alfred Maserini, his sister, and Leonard, were in another apartment ; they neither of them judged it expedient to appear before lord Albourne, his daughter, or any of the servants, for fear a sudden exclamation of their name should discover them to those who were about. They resolved, therefore, to remain private till morning, and then have an interview with his lordship. The fire being partly extinguished, the people dispersed, and quiet was in some measure restored.

At breakfast his lordship inquired in what manner his daughter escaped death. They were both informed of the circumstances relative to the behaviour of the young gentleman who had so valiantly undertaken to rescue her ; and heard not the repeated praises of the rustics unconcerned. Lord Albourne's heart, as well as his daughter's, overflowed with gratitude, and they both requested to see him as soon as possible. The woman of the house said she would call him directly, for that he had desired to be alone the remainder of the night. She left her noble guests, and repaired to the room where Alfred slept. Having knocked several times without receiving any answer, she opened the door, and, to her astonishment, found it empty. She immediately entered the chamber of his sister, and saw that was also deserted. The stables and loft where Leonard slept, were also searched ; but neither cattle nor man could be seen.

In

In Alfred's deserted apartment, they observed a note which lay on the table ; it was directed to lord Albourne : he received it, and the intelligence that the writer could no-where be found. His lordship read the following words :

“ TO LORD ALBOURNE.

“ MY LORD,

“ IF your lordship's curiosity should lead you to know the name of that man who saved your daughter from the flames, it may be satisfied by perusing these lines : the only return you can make him, is to keep it a secret ; an unfortunate circumstance having occurred, that renders a decampment (both mean and dastardly) necessary ; the manner of which is totally inconsistent with the character and equally against the inclinations of,

“ ALFRED MASERINI.”

If lord Albourne was astonished at the elopement of lady Caroline's preserver, he was, if possible, far more surprised at the contents of this note ; and although he felt the same obligation to him as to any other individual, yet he would rather have had lady Caroline's life saved by any other person. He concluded Alfred was in debt, and was therefore obliged to keep concealed. Lord Albourne was a nobleman of the nicest honour, and most generous sentiments ; he could not therefore consider himself happy in being obliged to a man whose ill qualities he had only known, and, as a stranger to his real character, detested his principles.

ciples. He strictly observed what was mentioned in the note, and made an excuse for the gentleman's sudden departure.

In private he acquainted his daughter with the truth. She shed tears: his lordship started: "I hope Caroline," said he with some warmth, "you encourage not a partiality for a man to whom I have many times declared a total dislike."

"Your lordship, surely, cannot blame these few marks of sensibility for one who has saved my life, and by that, I flatter myself, deserves your gratitude as well as your daughter's."

"My most sincere gratitude he certainly deserves," replied his lordship: "but yet I would rather he should have any recompense in the world than the affections of my child. You well know, Caroline, pride was never a leading trait in my character: I have never attempted to bias your inclinations respecting the choice of a husband, although you have had many noble offers. I therefore think I may reasonably require your compliance in one point, which is, never to marry a gamester: of this description Mr. Materini is known to be; and by that title I never could own him a son-in-law."

Lady Caroline sighed; her understanding told her his lordship's arguments were just; but her heart informed her she must suffer in the acquiescence to them.

Lord Albourne remained near six weeks at that place, till he was quite recovered, and then pursued his journey slow towards Italy.

C H A P. XXII.

LORD Albourne had observed, from the first evening of his daughter's introduction at Sir Peter Peviquil's, a growing partiality on her side towards the young Frenchman; and particular assiduities in his manner, which seemed calculated to gain the affections of any young lady to whom they were addressed.

His lordship, when thoroughly convinced these conjectures were well founded, determined to inquire more closely into the character and principles of his new acquaintance: he had received hints from several persons, that he was a man of no fortune; but wealth was the least object of lord Albourne's consideration; his own income was affluent and noble, having, as an only son, inherited the whole estate and title of his father: he therefore wisely conceived that his child might find more substantial happiness in a good man, though with only a small patrimony, than by receiving a higher name and additional luxuries, as the wife of a dissipated man of quality.

Under these ideas his lordship scrutinised the conduct of Alfred Maferini. He heeded not the envious tongue of calumny, but determined to be himself a spectator of those vices that should render him unfit for an alliance with lady Caroline. But he found the general voice to be too true, and more than once saw him seated among notorious sharpers at a gaming-table. Disgusted at the sight, he resolved
never

never to admit him in his family. Having informed his daughter of the resolution he had taken, he could perceive, by the manner of her receiving the declaration, that Love had on

*“ Her bosom seiz’d: shame void of guilt,
The charming blush of innocence, esteem,
And admiration of her lover’s flame,
By modesty exalted; even a sense
Of self-approving beauty stole across.
Her busy thought.”*

THOMSON.

Lord Albourne was now seriously alarmed, and resolved on a sudden scheme, to break off at once the connection.

He had received advice to travel, on account of his health, which had been in a declining state for some months. He considered this as a good opportunity to comply with the wishes of his friends; and by taking lady Caroline with him, the novelties of other countries, distance, and separation, might break an acquaintance which threatened her happiness for ever.

He accordingly ordered the servants to deny their young lady, whenever Mr. Maserini should call that day; and then gave immediate directions for a long journey, which he intended to take the next morning, having business of importance to transact in the country.

Lady Caroline was astonished, when she was requested by her father to accompany him, and prepare her wardrobe in as little time as possible.

“ Your

"Your lordship, I suppose, means to make no great stay: consequently, I shall have little occasion for many dresses."

"If I find, Caroline" returned lord Albourne, "that the air agrees with me, I may perhaps remain there some weeks, if not months; and, in that case, shall without doubt wish for your company. You had, therefore, better order the chief part of your clothes to be packed up: even your writing and drawing implements I would advise you to take with you."

The young lady was still more surprised and vexed at the stay her father intended to make; but even to wish not to go with him, was, in her ideas, cruelty to a parent who had always been so tenderly attached to her.

The next day they took leave of London. Lady Caroline did not mention the circumstance of seeing Alfred at the turnpike-gate. At a late hour in the evening they entered Dover, and slept there that night. During supper, his lordship opened his mind to his daughter—acquainted her with his motives for so suddenly leaving town, and his intentions of travelling through France and Italy, as he hoped change of climate would both benefit his health and drive from her mind a man unworthy of her esteem.

"You might, my dear Caroline," concluded his lordship, "have had reason to reproach me, had I listened to the tales of others; but I had the evidence of my own senses, and therefore could not be mistaken, in observing Mr. Maserini to be a person who would in a course of time bring his wife to wretchedness."

Lady

Lady Caroline made no answer: but her looks showed she thought her father's proceedings right, although they were entirely against her own inclinations. The next morning they crossed over to Calais, and travelled slowly towards the Alps, when they stopped at that inn where our young adventurers arrived a few hours after.

It was not a wonder that lord Albourne should be chagrined at the note he received; when it informed him that the very man who had given him so much uneasiness, and on whose account he left England, had in a few days' time overtaken them, and, by a noble act of courage and generosity, bound himself by the strongest ties, to the gratitude of both his daughter and himself.

His lordship, however, was soon convinced that his supposition on the cause of Alfred's departure was ill founded; but his knowledge of the actual reason of it served, if possible, to hurt him more than ever in that nobleman's opinion.

It will be now necessary to acquaint the reader with those circumstances that occasioned the young travellers' precipitate elopement from the inn.

Leonard was a second time going to retire to his bed, which was no better than a heap of straw placed by the side of his horses, when a large paper, stuck on the door of the stable, met his eye. Fatigued as he was, curiosity prompted him to hold up the lanthorn which he had in his hand, in order to read the contents; when, to his astonishment and horror, he perceived it to be an order for apprehending Alfred Maserini, as a deserter from his regiment,

ment, and a large reward to be given to any one who could produce him.

Astonished and alarmed at this intelligence, he stood some moments motionless. Having in some degree recovered, he ran back to the house; fortunately, the entrance was not fastened, and he arrived, without difficulty, at his master's chamber. He knocked, and Alfred answered. Leonard begged to be admitted. No sooner had he entered the room, than he informed him of the advertisement which he had seen, and entreated his master to set off again immediately. "I am perfectly well acquainted, sir, with a way across the Alps, and will be bound to conduct you safe into Italy."

This information was the most severe trial Alfred had ever yet experienced; he now saw his character and honour ruined, his name branded as that of a coward, and even publicly exposed as a villain, by a reward to be given for his person. "Leonard," said, he half frantic, "take care of my sister, and I will this moment fly and deliver myself up to my country: then I will explain my motives for my present behaviour, and die in a manner that shall not disgrace my family."

"Alas, sir," answered Leonard, "consider my young lady. I am a poor man, and little able to afford her that protection you request: not but that I would die in her defence; yet I am afraid my exertions in her behalf would be only looked on with contempt."

Alfred was tortured with contending passions;—one moment, his honour made him resolve to give himself up a victim to the sentence of a deserter;

a deserter ; but then, his sister in the power of count D'Ollifont, (who might recover) presented herself to his fancy ; nor was the idea of lady Caroline absent from his mind. A hope, a distant hope, seemed to inspire him with a wish to fly once more ignobly from pursuit, and try his fortune in that part where his parents had experienced the most poignant distresses.

Leonard was overjoyed at this resolution, and directly crept down stairs to the stable in order to prepare the horses ; and Alfred promised to follow in a little time. Having knocked at the door of his sister's apartment, he requested in a low voice that she would rise immediately, dress herself, take every thing out of the room that belonged to her, and come to his chamber.

Matilda was astonished ; but it was not a time for inquiries ; she accordingly did as he desired, as soon as possible. In the mean time, he wrote with a pencil those few lines that were delivered to lord Albourne. Being joined by his sister, he took their trunk, and led her to the stable ; when being placed on her horse, they departed with as much expedition as the darkness of the morning would permit.

There was not a doubt but that an order from France for Alfred's return to his regiment, at a very short notice, had been sent a few hours after he left his lodgings ; but still to advertise him as a deserter, was a method equally strange and uncommon.—In short, count D'Ollifont's interference seemed to appear in the affair ; and they greatly suspected that it was through his friends, some of whom were
superior

superior officers, and others in great favour at court, that such cruel proceedings were occasioned.

Alfred remained in a deep rêverie; and it was from Leonard that his sister learnt the reason for so sudden and unaccountable a flight. They were some miles from the house by daylight, and halted at a small cottage for some refreshment, before they began their journey on the Alps.—They had here, fortunately, an opportunity of changing the three horses for two mules, and a kind of carriage which would be more convenient and safe for Matilda to travel in; and also prevent remarks, which the sight of other animals might have occasioned among the peasants.

In about an hour, they again set off, and Leonard acted as driver the chief part of the way.

Nothing particular occurred during their journey across the Alps, which was extremely difficult and tedious, except a visible alteration in Alfred's health for the worse, and a settled deep melancholy in his sister, which threatened a total decline in her constitution.—Leonard in vain strove to point out to them the beauties of the country, and the romantic scenery which surrounded them; their own misfortunes engrossed every idea; and the cloud of misery, which had so long been gathering over their heads, seemed now ready to burst with full force and horror.—Their arrival in Italy was productive of little joy or comfort, as they had every reason to suppose the same papers had been published through that country. They secreted themselves as well as possible, at every place where they stopped, using the nicest economy.

economy for fear of exhausting their little store; which, although it might last them a considerable time with frugality—yet, with extravagance, could be but of short duration.

Alfred had resolved in his own mind, from their first setting off from Dover, to visit Grasville Abbey;—he now considered it would be a place of great service in point of secreting them from their enemies, as there was little doubt but superstition had kept it entirely free from inhabitants or curious visitors.—But these intentions he determined to keep from the knowledge of Matilda; for he well knew the idea of residing there would add greatly to those sufferings she already experienced: and the circumstances of the light in the west tower,—the noise which was heard by their father,—and his remarkable disappearance, were subjects which his sister dwelt on with horror, whenever she read the manuscript of her aunt.—But he hoped to persuade her to remain there for some little time, and then considered that she would soon become comfortable in it, even as a place of abode.

Leonard well knew the roads that led to the Abbey, as he had often seen it when young, and could well remember the hospitality and goodness of the old count Maserini. To him Alfred privately conveyed his intentions, and requested him to bring them to the mansion on a sudden, and unknown to Matilda. The man seemed hurt on account of his young lady, and begged leave to remind him that it would be cruel to distress her, when she needed no more occasions for terror, or alarm.

“ I thank you for the caution,” returned Alfred coolly:—“ but am not yet so great a villain,

a villain, as to behave in the manner you suppose."

Leonard looked confused; his master continued—

"I will not even propose a favourable argument to keep her there against her own inclination. But you must agree that if Matilda could divest herself of idle terrors, and acquiesce in the plan, it would in every respect be particularly fortunate, both in preserving our little property, and concealing us from the eye of malice or contempt."

With these intentions they rode some leagues each day, and on the fifth morning from their first entering Italy, found themselves within six hours' travelling of Grasville Abbey. The clouds seemed to indicate an approaching storm; rain fell in large drops, and several claps of thunder were heard at a distance. Matilda was alarmed, and begged they might alight at some place where they might find shelter till the tempest should in some degree abate.—In vain they looked round for a cottage or hovel to answer their purpose; no such place could be seen; when their attention was called off by the sight of a young girl, seemingly about sixteen—Her hands were clasped, and her eyes lifted toward heaven.—Her appearance showed both terror and distress. Leonard drove to the spot where she stood, and Alfred offered the shelter of their vehicle, which she accepted with joy; and by her thanks for their kindness, they perceived she was a native of France. Matilda inquired to what part she was going.—She answered with an unaffected simplicity, "Any where."—They were both astonished at the reply, but restrained

restrained their curiosity and desired Leonard to drive on.

The storm had now blown over, though the clouds were still gloomy and unsettled; but the latter part of the day they again joined, and seemed to foretell another war of elements.—Vivid flashes of white lightning darted on the ground, and loud claps of thunder (which was now much nearer) burst over their heads.—Matilda declared she would rather put up with any situation, than travel while it lasted; and Agnes (which was the name of the young girl) was extremely terrified.—At that moment they perceived the turrets of Grasville Abbey rise above the trees which surrounded it. Alfred ordered Leonard to drive immediately to it.

Matilda shuddered, yet was ashamed to confess her fears. It was now nearly dark, and they entered a grove of ancient cedars, that led to the front gate. The lightning was horrid, and the thunder seemed to shake even the centre of the earth;—both Agnes and Matilda were nearly insensible, when the carriage stopped before the Abbey.—One wing seemed entirely in ruins, but they had no time for observations. Leonard had not quitted the mule he rode on two minutes before the animal was struck dead at his feet; and each expected the same fate.—Alfred flew to the gates, and being assisted by his servant, after some efforts, they yielded to their strength, and burst open, being unlocked.

Leonard drove the carriage into the court; having pushed against the heavy folding doors that led to the internal part, they easily opened, but with a considerable noise, that confirmed

no one had entered this dreary mansion for many years. Agnes and Matilda were carried into the hall, and the mules and vehicle put under a piazza.

Leonard having kindled a fire on the pavement with some faggots, by the help of a tinder-box which he had in his pocket, the party were in some measure recovered, and looked with horror on the gloomy and desolate appearance of the place that gave them shelter.

C H A P. XXIII.

TERROR.

*“ Light thickens, and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood;
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
While night's black agents to their prey do rouse,
Thou marvell'st at my words: but hold thee still:
Things bad began, make strong themselves by ill.
So pray thee go with me.”*

MACBETH.

SUPERSTITION (though greatly encouraged by idle conversation and fabulous tales) is natural to mankind, and often inhabits the breasts of those whose valour and intrepidity in other respects have been equally known and experienced.

It produces terrors, of all others, the most to be dreaded and strove against;—for although they

they cannot be entirely overcome, yet, by giving the least way to them, life is at once made uncomfortable and disagreeable.

From childhood we are taught to believe in the reality of preternatural apparitions, by the prattle and simple stories of those, who, in general, abuse their care of children, by instilling into their young minds terrific and horrid ideas. As age advances, they are more likely to increase than decline;—and the number of relations, seemingly authentic, which are continually in circulation, serve greatly to confirm the horrors of imagination.—Whether such histories proceed from the visionary remorse of guilty consciences,—from affectation, or the tongue of falsehood,—from insanity, weakness, or oppression of spirits,—from nervous disorders, or romantic thoughts and contrivances,—is equally as difficult to be ascertained, as whether some of them are not actually true, and the works of a Supreme Deity, for wise and unknown ends. Many men of great learning and genius have differed widely on this point: and though even the immortal Addison could not positively give a decisive opinion on those topics, yet his words on the subject will ever be remembered and admired.

“ I know but one way of fortifying my soul against these gloomy presages and terrors of mind; and that is by securing to myself the friendship and protection of that Being, who disposes of events, and governs futurity. He sees at one view the whole thread of my existence, not only that part of it which I have already passed through, but that which runs forward into all the depths of eternity. When I lay me down to sleep, I recommend myself to his care; when

when I awake, I give myself up to his direction. Amidst all the evils that threaten me, I will look up to him for help, and question not but he will either avert them, or turn them to my advantage. Though I know neither the time nor the manner of the death I am to die, I am not at all solicitous about it—because I am sure that he knows them both, and that he will not fail to comfort and support me under them*.”

Grafville Abbey was situated near Montferrat in Italy, and but a little distance from the Gulph of Genoa; its lofty turrets, on one side, commanded a view of Piedmont, and the prospect was bounded by the towering and majestic summits of the Alps:—the other wing looked over the perspective scenery of Parma, Placenza, Mirandola, and the river Po, while at the extremity of the prospect, in an oblique view, Venice might just be observed. The back front looked over Valentia, Casal, and Vercelli, and terminated in a distant sight of Savoy.

But none of these countries could be seen but from the top casements of the two towers; the lower part of the Abbey being entirely surrounded by thick foliage, pines and cypress-trees, with many ancient cedars.

The building was in every respect calculated to inspire awe and solemnity, both in the external and internal appearance. After the death of the count Maserini, many strange accounts were talked of by the peasants; and count D'Ollifont's sudden departure from it, at the funeral of his uncle, seemed to confirm those reports that had before been circulated through the surrounding country. From that time it was shut up, without any of the furniture being

VOL. I.

H

removed;

removed; and no one had been known to enter it till signor Maferini, son to the late count, and father to Alfred and Matilda. His sudden and remarkable disappearance raised the horror of the place, if possible, more than ever; even those who had before laughed at the superstition of their neighbours, were extremely alarmed at so dreadful and uncommon an occurrence. No person ever walked beyond the entrance of the grove that led to the gates; and the only human habitation that stood near it, was a cell which contained an old hermit, who had lived there ever since the Abbey had been forsaken, and subsisted on the charity of the neighbouring cottagers.

The travellers remained in the hall till day light, when the storm abated, and they began to wish for some repose. Leonard pulled two arm chairs, which stood in a recess, towards the fire, and Agnes and Matilda strove to sleep in them; while Alfred and his servant laid themselves down on an old bench that stood near the spot. After some hours they awoke, and found themselves much refreshed. Leonard was immediately dispatched to see that the gates were close in the same manner as they were before, to prevent suspicion of any one having passed them.

They then opened their portmanteau, and found they had provisions for that day: this circumstance was extremely fortunate, as they could have time to contrive some method of replenishing their store. Leonard had also got victuals for his surviving mule. They had now an opportunity to take a more particular account of their situation; and Alfred, smilingly asked his

his sister, if she had any objection to explore with him the apartments by day-light: she cheerfully consented; but Agnes was terrified at the idea of attending them, and equally afraid of remaining in the hall by herself, but at last resolved on the former.

The hall was of ancient architecture, but extremely noble, though heavy in the design. It was supported by large gothic columns; the capitals were chiefly decayed, the shafts were composed of stained marble; and though of a considerable height, the diameters were greater than the strict rules of that kind of architecture would admit. The top opened in a large dome and gallery, the walls of which had exhibited beautiful paintings, that were now nearly destroyed: a large painted skylight terminated the height; and additional light was received from four elevated casements on different sides of the hall. Pilasters of the same dimensions upwards stood opposite the pillars, between each of which were niches that held statues larger than life; these were in some preservation, as the count had them placed there when he first came to the estate.

Two large fire-places stood at each end, which seemed to show that hospitality and the comforts of life had once been enjoyed in this dreary and melancholy abode. The pavement was of black and white marble, the stones of which were of a considerable size. In the front stood a large pair of heavy folding doors that led to the apartments on the east and west wings of the abbey. Two stone stair-cases appeared on each side, which wound to the chambers above.

Alfred resolved first to examine the lower apartments, and accordingly opened the folding doors, which discovered a small passage, supported by Tuscan pillars; at the further part of it was a descent of several steps, which were in many parts broken and decayed; at the bottom of them was a pair of large iron gates, through which they perceived the remains of an extensive and noble chapel; this part they supposed had stood nearly in the same state from the first foundation of the building, as then intended for a place of religious worship. They re-ascended the steps, and discovered in the passage two large openings, which seemed to lead to the different suites of apartments. They first entered those of the west wing. The furniture in the first room had been extremely elegant, though antique; it was in tolerable preservation, considering the number of years it had remained there without care; many noble paintings were yet hanging, but so decayed by damps that it was impossible to make out the subjects. The second room was rather larger than the first, but in far worse condition; the tapestry was entirely destroyed, and both the casements and shutters broke nearly to pieces; the columns which supported it, seemed also rotten and decayed.

From this apartment they walked through many others that were in the same condition, and showed no signs of having contained any mortal within them for many years. In the last room there was a strong door, which they perceived, by a window, opened into a court or terrace.

Having returned to the hall, they entered the apartments of the east wing. They were
smaller

smaller though more in number than those they had left; and by the plainness of the internal part, they supposed them to have been offices for servants. At the extent of them was a door of the same size with that they had observed on the other side, and which opened also to the other end of the terrace.

"The situation of this place," said Alfred, "shows that the inhabitants left it on a sudden; but yet it is amazing that so noble a building, and such elegant furniture, should have been left to perish by the ravages of time and neglect."

"I cannot say I am altogether so astonished at that," answered Matilda: "for after such circumstances happening in it, for heaven's sake who would willingly choose it for a habitation?"—Her brother smiled; and having again returned to the hall, they ascended one of the stair-cases, but soon perceived that both terminated in one landing. The abbey here was not divided; the chambers were consequently far more intricate: the apartments were spacious, and had been nobly furnished; the beds were heavy and antique; but all nearly destroyed.—They however, after some trouble, contrived to change one thing with another, till they made up three tolerable beds. Two of them were in a large chamber, and the other closely adjoining. They deferred, however, finishing their search till the next day, on account of airing what they were to lie on at night. Leonard accordingly made a good fire in the hall, and the clothes were placed before it immediately.—After another repast,

Matilda begged Agnes to relate to them those occurrences that caused her to be exposed to the fury of so terrible a storm.—“ Alas ! Mademoiselle.” returned Agnes, “ I should even before this have related to you my little history, had I not been afraid you would have condemned my conduct ; but at least,” continued the poor girl, with tears in her eyes, “ you shall never have reason to reproach me with ingratitude for the favours I have received from you.

Both Alfred and Matilda desired her, if the relation would bring fresh grief to her memory, to decline it, as in that case they would willingly suspend their curiosity.

Agnes declared, that, though it might raise in her mind many sorrows, yet it would in the end give her pleasure to make them acquainted with her little narrative.—The party having seated themselves by the fire, listened with attention to their artless orator.

CHAP. XXIV.

———“ *Yet I think
My tale will move each gentle heart to pity*”
HOME.

AGNES'S TALE.

“ **M**Y grandfather and his wife were natives of France, and resided near Moulins.—His cottage was situated in the deep descent of a beautiful valley, and his name was La Faril.”

Alfred here looked at his sister;—they both recollected the name in their aunt's manuscript, where he was spoken of in the highest terms, as one who preserved them, at the hazard of his own life, in a cave near his house, from the officers of justice.—They did not, however, interrupt the fair speaker.

“ They supported themselves comfortably by their industry and economy, and were respected not only by the inhabitants of their little vale, but by all who knew them even at a distance from it.

“ They had a son and daughter; the former was the eldest, but it was to the latter they looked up for comfort and consolation in their old age.—Leolin had manifested from his birth a proud and haughty disposition, which

made him rebel against all controul, and be ashamed to own his parents, on account of their inferior condition in life. Both tried in vain, by inculcating honest and industrious ideas, to erase from his bosom those dangerous and infamous principles which seemed natural to him.—All was however useless :—he refused to be a peasant, and determined to go to Paris, and seek his fortune in that city,

“ He there entered into the service of a dissipated nobleman, as valet de chambre. In this situation he was introduced to scenes of luxury, villany, and dishonour; while every trait in his character, which had, when a child, only appeared at intervals, (though enough to alarm his parents) now blazed forth with redoubled vigour, and destroyed those few good qualities he had shown in his youth :—in short, he was both a gamester and a swindler. His father received but one letter from him during three years; but reports of his misconduct were continually in circulation through that part of the country, although so extremely retired. The health of both his parents was much injured by these accounts; and their only comfort was the little Sabina.—About four years after Leolin had left his home, he returned to it, for the first time, one night, at an unusual hour, but greatly altered, not with the healthful bloom of youth upon his cheek, but feeble, emaciated, and an old man in constitution, though only twenty-one years of age.

“ His father and mother were greatly shocked at the sight of him, but far more so when he demanded to be concealed in a cave that was at the bottom of the garden; they
however

however lost no time in complying with his desire, as he said he expected to be followed by the officers of justice in less than two hours, on account of a robbery he had committed:—nor was his conjecture wrong: for early in the morning the cottage was surrounded by several men: but their search proved ineffectual; for the cave was so closely concealed as to prevent any discovery. He remained at home some little time, but shortly returned to those vices which had already taken too fast hold on his inclinations, to suffer him to relinquish them, while he had health or strength to follow their pursuits.

“ The next news they heard of him was about six months after, when his father was conducted to Provence, where Leolin lay at the point of death, encompassed with misery, wretchedness, and want;—eaten up with disease, his soul torn with remorse for past crimes, and sinking into eternity with a conscience racked by the contending passions of horror and dismay. He, however, survived long enough to receive a parent’s blessing, who would, even then, have sacrificed his own life, to have saved that of a profligate and undutiful son.

“ After seeing Leolin decently interred, the good old man returned to his cottage overwhelmed with grief, yet with some hope of enjoying a few years of tranquillity, which might make him a recompense for past misfortunes. But how vain is the foresight of mortals! in a very little time he lost the beloved partner of his heart, who had struggled with him through the early part of life, and been

equally a partaker in his adversity and pleasures.

“ His health and spirits suffered now a greater shock than ever, and every week visibly altered him for the worse. His daughter Sabina had for some months received offers of marriage from Cyril, the son of a neighbouring cottager ; and the ceremony was shortly to have taken place, had not the sudden death of her mother put it aside. But after some time they were joined together in the holy bands of wedlock ; and La Faril still remained with his child, whose attendance and affection he now needed more than ever.

“ I was born about twelve months after their marriage, and was greatly beloved by my parents and grandfather. I had just attained my thirteenth year when my father's father died, and though every person had supposed him to be a man possessed of some little property, yet even his son was astonished to find himself heir to a considerable fortune. After the funeral, we were surprised to find my father intended to leave his native valley and cottage, to enjoy the luxuries of Paris. This news was like a thunder-bolt to my mother, who knew it would break her parent's heart to leave that place, where he had been born, brought up, and continued so many years ; and she was certain it would equally distress him to be robbed of her company and attendance. In vain she advised her husband to give up all ideas of abandoning their cottage for dissipation and vice ; but to purchase some land in that part, which would then be doubly dear to them.

“ My

“ My father was deaf to all entreaties, and declared his intentions of setting off in a short time. Our only hope was now that the solicitations of the good La Faril would have more effect on him:—but alas! he was too weak, and too much shocked, to make any exertion in the affair; and his prayers failed like those of his daughter. The poor old man was consequently obliged to be removed to the house of a neighbour, while his beloved child was forced from him by a cruel husband, whose ambition was kindled by the possession of a little wealth. The cottage and goods being disposed of, with many tears on the part of my mother and me, we took leave of my grandfather and our native vale. At the expiration of a day we found ourselves in the gay city of Paris:—and being settled in handsome lodgings, the first news we received was the death of La Faril, who survived but a very short time after his daughter's departure. It will be needless to enlarge on the grief that both my mother and I felt on the occasion;—we even thought we could trace some signs of remorse and sorrow in the breast of my father.

“ We were shortly introduced to those gaieties and vices which are supposed to constitute genteel life. Having been settled about six months in our apartments, my mother candidly asked my father what trade or profession he intended to follow, or in what manner he designed to turn his fortune to the best advantage:—but he told us to enjoy our present blessings, without troubling ourselves with painful ideas of what might happen on the morrow. These pernicious principles were certainly, in
one

one respect, the ruin of us;—for he heeded not the advice of his wife or real friends, but plunged into every extravagance that seemed to gratify his wishes.

“ He however took some little care of my education, and I was instructed in every branch of useful learning.

“ Matters continued in this situation for three years; during which time my father purchased a handsome villa, and our house was constantly crowded with company. His wife most earnestly entreated him to contract his expenses; but her prayers were useless, and he still answered in the same careless manner, ‘ Let to-morrow take care for itself.’ We, nevertheless, saw him at times distressed and unhappy, and he would return home in an evening, from spending the day abroad, nearly in a state of distraction. My mother had sometimes hinted to me, the cause of this strange behaviour was gambling; and we were thoroughly convinced of it, when a man, one night, brought a note directed to him, and desired an answer to it immediately. Having opened it, we found it contained an appointment to a gaming-house that evening.

“ I need not describe to you the fresh anxiety this information gave us, nor the rage of my father at the discovery of it:—but we could now plainly tell when he was a favourite of Fortune, and when not, by the different turns of his temper. Among the most intimate of his friends was a Monsieur Le Selet. This man was a well-known gambler, and withal a dangerous character in point of gallantry (as he styled it) among the ladies. He was a constant visitor; and we seldom sat down to table, but he was one
of

of the party. Monsieur Le Selet, more than once, offended both my mother and myself by his behaviour to us in private; and we complained of it to my father; but he only rallied us on our prudery, as he called it; and declared him to be a man who had his interest at heart.

“ These gloomy fits which had only appeared at intervals, now returned more and more frequently, insomuch that we really thought his brain was affected, and entreated him to have some advice. But he would then fly into a violent passion:—nor was it till three months after, that he confessed the cause of it was the entire loss of his fortune; and not only that, but he was a debtor to Monsieur to a very considerable amount.

“ At the time of this confession, Le Selet entered the room, and requested to speak with my father in private:—we accordingly retired to an apartment some distance from that we left. In about two hours, while we were wondering at their long conference, we were very much alarmed by hearing the bell in that room ring violently. Soon after, we heard the servants in a kind of confusion, and were just going to leave the chamber in order to inquire the reason for such proceedings, when we were met by the house-keeper. ‘ My master! my master!’ was all she could say. In vain we asked her to explain her meaning; she could utter no other words.

“ We were therefore obliged to run to the parlour we had before left,—when, judge our feelings at seeing my father and Monsieur Le Selet both weltering in their blood. We ran to the former:—he had just recovered from a fainting fit, and languidly looked up. We knelt by him and wept

wept; he seemed affected; and those eyes which were half closed by death, shed tears of sorrow and repentance when it was too late.

‘My wife! my child!’ he cried, in a voice scarcely articulate, ‘I have injured you much:—I have taken you from the peaceful habitation of innocence, to be surrounded by vice and villainy, to experience poverty, distress, and oppression. Oh! my God!’ he exclaimed with fervency, ‘look down upon them; shield them with thy mercy from the iron rod of tyranny and injustice; nor condemn them for the wickedness of him who now implores thy aid.’

“His voice failed him; he fell into convulsions, and expired. Greatly as we had to complain of his conduct, yet our grief was excessive. A surgeon had been sent for, but all medical aid was useless. The wound he received, as we afterwards understood, was by his own hand:—a servant had, from the hall, overheard the conversation. Monsieur Le Selet had called upon him that day for the payment of the sum he owed. My father begged the interval of a week to discharge it; this the former absolutely refused, but told him the whole might on one condition be forgiven. He asked with eagerness by what method he should cancel the obligation; when Le Selet gave him a paper:—this paper the servant had snatched from the floor, and presented to us:—it was a bond by which my father was to resign his child to the arms of a villain, without any ceremony or articles of marriage. The horror he conceived at this proposal was too much for him to support, and he gave way at once to the passions of revenge and despair:—he

—he seized a dagger, and plunged it into the breast of the infamous Le Selet,—then rang the bell violently, and afterwards, with the same hand, struck the bloody steel to his own heart. Monsieur Le Selet was removed to another chamber, but no hopes entertained of his recovery.

“ The wound, however, we were informed, seemed more favourable after a few days; and we requested that he might be taken from the house as soon as a removal would not endanger his life. My father’s affairs were greatly involved:—but we had the happiness to find, that, after the villa and goods with other effects were sold, there would not only be enough to pay his debts, but a small sum remaining. We now determined to return to our native valley, and accordingly took leave of Paris, and soon found ourselves before that cottage which we had once called our own, and where the remembrance of past felicity made our present misfortunes more poignant.

“ We were obliged to the charity of a neighbour for a lodging, till we purchased a little hovel for our residence. I then opened a small school, and had the greater part of the children in the place. By this employment we gained a comfortable living.

“ Among the neighbouring villagers was one of the name of Oliver. His character was without reproach, and he asked my hand in marriage.

“ Neither his friends nor my mother had any objection to this match, though the latter would often frequently say, she thought my person might command a richer husband. On
the

the evening before that day which was to have united us, as we were sitting before our cottage, sometimes joining in the rustic dance, we were suddenly stopped in our amusement by the arrival of a gentleman and his servant. The former advanced with a courteous air:—but judge of my astonishment and horror, when I perceived it to be Monsieur Le Selet. He seemed perfectly recovered, and requested to speak with my mother alone.

“ I trembled at the result of their discourse, which continued some time ;—but all my conjectures and my misery were complete, when my mother informed me, that monsieur, having thoroughly repented of his former ill conduct and behaviour, now offered, as an atonement, to make me his wife. He sprang to embrace me ; but I shrunk from his arms, and fainted away. On my recovery, they were each standing by me, and entreated me to discard my present lover ; while the artful Le Selet talked in so insinuating a manner, as to bring over my mother entirely to his favour ; for she supposed it would secure a handsome independence for her child. But this conversation had no effect on me, and they each retired with anger, and I with grief and distress. But I determined that night to leave them all. Whether you will blame my conduct, I know not, mademoiselle ; but I was certain that monsieur was by no means the repentant person he seemed to be ; and even if he had, I never could have liked him for a husband. I was also sure that my mother could get a living in the same employment as myself ; for it had been agreed that she should take my school after I was married.

With

With these ideas, I packed up a few clothes, with a little money, in a bundle, and left the cottage as soon as I thought my mother was asleep. I had not yet, however, resolved to what part I should go, but determined to apply to a carrier whom I had known for some time. He was to set out on a long journey early in the morning, and he lived about a mile distant. By the time I arrived there, he was just going to set off. The man's surprise was excessive to see me, who he supposed was to have been made a wife that day.

"I explained to him the reasons for my visit, and threw myself on his protection; he readily granted it, and told me he was going to Italy. This information gave me great pleasure, as I thought I might there get employment, and conceal my real name and family.

"We had not entered this country above two days, before Basil (the carrier's name) was taken ill; his disorder proved violent, and in less than a week he was no more. I was necessitated to sell his cart and the whole of his goods to pay the expences of his funeral and his illness. I now found myself in a strange place without money or friends. The people, however, at the house where Basil had died, informed me there was a family a few miles distant, who wanted a domestic. I accordingly applied:—but how great was my disappointment to find they were just provided with one! I found the whole of my little property would support me but three days longer, and began seriously to repent leaving my cottage, when I was overtaken by that violent storm, which proved one of the happiest incidents of my life, by introducing me to your friendship, care, and generosity;

generosity ; to which I most certainly owe my existence."—Here the poor girl burst into a flood of tears, and concluded the story.

CHAP. XXV.

SECRECY.

*" Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased ;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow ;
Rase out the written troubles of the brain ;
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the foul bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart ?"*

SHAKESPEARE.

BOTH Alfred and Matilda thanked Agnes for the recital of her narrative : they pitied her misfortunes, and promised to protect her as long as it was in their power. Not only their own feelings at the time prompted them to this, but gratitude for the assistance their parents had received from her family. After some further conversation, the bed furniture was carried to the rooms above ; and, having partook of a slight supper, they retired to their apartments. The chambers, however, seemed extremely cold, and Matilda begged Leonard would make up a little fire of faggots in each of them.

This

This was accordingly done; and Agnes having lighted a wax taper, which she placed on a large marble slab, they took leave of Alfred for the night, who, with his faithful servant, entered the room adjoining.

"Before we go to rest," said Matilda, "I will take a more particular survey of this chamber."

Agnes trembled; Matilda took the taper, and walked round it. The apartment was not so large as many, but had equally the same gloomy appearance.—The bed had formerly been noble and elegant, but was now partly decayed; the high and heavy cornice of it seemed rotted by time; the furniture, they could just perceive, had been of crimson velvet; but the curtains were now, in many parts, entirely threadbare. An old-fashioned cabinet and dressing-table, both of which had been ornamented with gilded figures, and stood in a gothic recess, by the dim light, seemed, in form, to represent a tomb. Matilda, in vain, strove to open the former; it was locked, nor could she find any key. The wainscoting was hung round with large pictures; but, except one, they were all nearly destroyed, so as to make it impossible to discover the subjects. That which was in some preservation was the portrait of a man, in an Italian habit, at full length. He seemed of middle size and elegant figure; but the countenance was melancholy and dejected, while he rested with one arm on the fragment of a grave-stone. Matilda gazed on it for a considerable time; it was extremely like the miniature of her father, which she wore.

wore in her bosom. She stood in such a situation that the eyes seemed to look full at her.

Painful and horrid ideas now arose in her mind; she almost fancied she saw the features move:—the thought overcame her: she shuddered, sunk in a chair, and burst into a flood of tears. Agnes had attentively observed her, and now joined her tears with those of Matilda; yet, with unaffected simplicity, strove to give her comfort and consolation. Her efforts at last succeeded, and, drying her tears, the former retired to a restless pillow.

It was a considerable time before Matilda could close her eyes; the misfortunes that encompassed her appeared now more terrible than ever. Agnes was in a serene sleep; all was silent and gloomy: her eyes wandered over the desolate chamber; and she could still see by the sudden light of the wood fire, which was dying away, but now and then blazed at intervals, the face of the picture, which still seemed to look at her. The ember was at last entirely extinguished, and the room was left in total darkness, except from the flame of the wax taper. At length, tired out with melancholy and terrific recollections, she fell into a disturbed slumber.

Horrid visions and ghastly figures now floated on her brain. Her father approached, covered with blood; and, with an angry tone, called on her to revenge his murder. She started, turned, and again composed herself to rest; but it was impossible. She now saw herself in an apartment of the abbey that was hung with black; in the middle of which lay a corpse in state: she walked up to the coffin:
a voice

a voice whispered her, it was her grandfather. His countenance was black ; and it struck her he was poisoned. At that moment count D'Ollifont appeared ; he attempted to force her from the spot ; but, at the apparition of her father, which then ascended, with an ashy paleness, and disfigured with wounds, he fled, and Matilda, in the struggle of horror and affliction, again awoke. In short, during the whole night, her mind was so entirely disordered by uneasy slumbers, that she arose in the morning with a considerable degree of fever, and by no means refreshed. It was remarkably fine, and she ventured to open the heavy casement of her chamber. There was no danger of being observed ; the high trees that surrounded the building, made it impossible she could be perceived but by those in the inner part. The air refreshed her, but the langour of her spirits still continued.

The breakfast, which Agnes had prepared with the utmost neatness, was served in the first apartment next the hall. Leonard had got up very early, and cleaned it out ; and the room now wore a far more comfortable appearance than it had done the day before. Alfred noticed the pale looks of his sister, and asked, with a smile, if she had been disturbed by any of the ghosts. She declared she had not been in the least alarmed ; and each answering in the same manner, their fears of supernatural intrusion partly vanished.

They now consulted the best method to procure provision, which must be done that day, with several other articles : at last it was agreed that Leonard should take a basket, and

go out from the abbey so as to be seen by no one in the way to it; and that he should mix with other persons in the public market, where he could purchase what he wanted, and perhaps gain some intelligence concerning their residence, and other circumstances, relative to the count: but Alfred desired him by no means to force the conversation, as it might raise curiosity in the peasantry to know who and what he was. This matter being settled, Leonard was shortly equipped, and sallied forth with the utmost caution.

Alfred now proposed to his sister to examine those apartments they had not had time to look at the night before. Agnes said she now had courage enough to stay in the great hall, which she had much rather do, and employ herself in preparing the dinner.

Alfred and Matilda accordingly ascended the stair-case, and walked through the suit of rooms they had before seen. They then crossed several others, larger and far more heavy.— These terminated in a passage, supported by small columns, and arched over in the gothic style. This place was extremely dark; they, however, with some difficulty, passed it, and entered, by a pair of folding doors, a more spacious apartment than they had yet seen, and, if possible, more gloomy. It had been entirely hung with black, and, from every appearance, had contained a corpse that had lain there in state at some former period. Several pieces of tapers were still standing in black glasses; and, in the middle, stood bearers for the purpose of supporting a coffin; but there was now only the

the remains of a large plume of black feathers.

Matilda thought of her dream, and trembled. Alfred himself seemed at first struck with awe, but presently recovering himself, laughed at his sister, and strove to keep up his own spirits, by rallying Matilda on her fears. She entreated him to return; the gloomy horror of this chamber overcame her, and she found herself extremely faint. He placed her on a kind of couch, that had also been covered with black velvet, and made several efforts to open the windows; this was, however, to no purpose; but after some trouble, he pulled down a part of the broken shutters, and consequently received more light, which had before only entered from an opening at the top.

Matilda in a few minutes recovered, but declared she would proceed no further.—Alfred persuaded her to ascend the stairs that wound round the west tower; but she positively refused.

He wished much to see the apartment, which, by his aunt's manuscript, he was informed, terminated, as was supposed, the search of his father. But his sister absolutely refusing to go any further, they returned to the hall. Agnes noticed the dejected looks of Matilda, but did not inquire the cause. Alfred resolved within himself to examine the west tower the following day, and satisfy his curiosity concerning the mystery of that extraordinary chamber.

Agnes was in far better spirits than she had been in since their meeting, and tried every way to comfort and entertain her dejected friends.

friends. Both felt the kindness of her intention, and acquainted her with most of the circumstances relative to their misfortunes: there were, however, some events they thought proper to conceal.

Lady Caroline Albourne was, however, still one of the chief objects of Alfred's thoughts. He loved her, yet was conscious he had not even merited her esteem.—By her manner just before he left England, he flattered himself he could perceive innocent traits of a confession of more than a common regard for him. But even though his conjectures should prove right, her prudence, her understanding, must have told her to tear from her heart a man, who, by the conduct he then pursued, must bring her to wretchedness, want, and misery. But there was yet even a greater misfortune to strike him with remorse. His name, his character, were tarnished with dishonour. That name, which, he had been proud to say, had not shamed the family it belonged to, and that nicety of honour which it had been his utmost pride to preserve, were now, through folly and extravagance, ruined by the slanderous tongue of calumny, both in England and his own country. In the former it was most likely he would receive the appellation of an assassin and a swindler; in the latter, he would be branded as a base, mean, cowardly deserter from the service of his country; a disgrace to France, and the noble profession he had been brought up to—the defence of his country's rights.

“ Damned ideas !” he would exclaim in a voice of frantic rage.—His sister and Agnes were

were alarmed.—He begged their pardon:—it was the recollection of former distress that crossed his brain at that moment. Matilda plainly perceived his impetuosity of temper broke out at every interval when the recollection of his folly, and the misery it had brought them to, intruded on his memory. She therefore studiously avoided to mention any topic in discourse that might lead to a remembrance of disagreeable circumstances.

Her griefs were consequently buried in her own bosom; yet they were not less poignant than those of her brother. She loved Mr. Milverne; but every hope of seeing him again appeared almost impossible. His letter, which they received at Dover, mentioned that he would join them as soon as possible in Italy; but they then had little thought of an occurrence happening, that obliged them to keep more concealed in this place, than their situation might have required them to have done, had they remained in England. Nor was it likely Mr. Milverne should even have an idea that they were inhabitants of Grasville Abbey. The more she thought on those sufferings she had experienced since her mother's death, the more she was surprised how she had survived such a series of misfortunes; but it fully convinced her that the Supreme Being constantly supports those who trust in him, though they may for a time be ordained to bear a load of adversity and sorrow.

Leonard returned in about two hours, laden with the purchases he had made. He acquainted them that he had been taken no particular notice of;—but, mingling with other

persons, had bought commodities, without receiving any disagreeable questions, This was pleasing intelligence, and they sat down to dinner with some degree of chearfulness. But yet there was something in Leonard's countenance, which showed he had been greatly chagrined, and that he had heard more than he chose to communicate. At the latter part of the day he requested to speak with his master alone.

Alfred immediately granted his request, and they ascended to their chamber.

Matilda was a silent spectator of this mysterious behaviour. Agnes was extremely alarmed; she was certain, she said, from Leonard's behaviour, that he must have received some very dreadful intelligence: and, in all probability, he thought it of too terrible a nature for them to be informed of.

Matilda smiled, and strove to dispel her fears, but was herself very much hurt. Agnes's conjecture was by no means unlikely; yet she felt herself slighted at not being made a confidant in the affair. Their conference lasted near two hours. When they returned to the parlour, Leonard's countenance was still more gloomy, while Alfred strove to assume a gaiety foreign to his heart. Their supper was a silent meal; each seemed absorbed in melancholy reflections; and, after some little time, they retired to their apartments.

CHAP. XXVI.

ANOTHER sleepless night was passed by Matilda; and Agnes requested she would take her breakfast, before she arose for the day. She therefore acquainted Alfred with his sister's indisposition. He was extremely concerned, and far more so to observe her dejected manner and pale countenance, when she joined them at dinner. Leonard seemed rather more chearful than he had been the night before; but his master still retained a gloomy sadness, that showed some cause of distress lay heavy at his heart. Both surveyed Matilda with a scrutinising eye, and Alfred after some little time asked with a pretended air of indifference, if she had rested as free from disturbance as the night before.

It would not have been difficult for a common person to have perceived he paused with unusual anxiety for an answer, though he strove, as much as possible, to conceal that emotion which was visible to all.—She told him she had.—This reply seemed to give him considerable pleasure; and on her returning the question, he also answered in the affirmative. The alteration in his manner continued but a few moments, and he again relapsed into his former melancholy. He now mentioned

his intention of examining the rooms in the west tower, and asked Leonard to accompany him in his researches. Matilda said languidly, that she also meant to be of the party ;—at which declaration her brother looked very much chagrined.

“ I rather think, Matilda,” said he, “ you had better decline it ; the coldness and dampness of those deserted chambers will not agree with your health and spirits ; particularly now you are so much indisposed.”

She thought it might amuse her, and was certain the walk would be of service. Agnes attended ; and they opened the large heavy door that showed the winding stone stair-case of the west tower. They found it very disagreeable to ascend,—the place having been so long forsaken, that large webs of dust and dirt almost impeded their passage. They at length, however, arrived at the first landing-place, where two apartments appeared,—the one to the right, the other to the left. They entered the former. It was a small square room, lighter than many they had seen in the abbey, but entirely clear from furniture ; that on the left was of the same size, but contained several implements of war, among which were swords, shields, spears, and a few fire-arms.—a trumpet and drum, with other instruments of martial music : but all of them were in bad repair.

They again ascended the continuation of the stone stair-case, and found themselves on the second landing. The apartment on this floor were of the same dimensions as those below, but had been far better furnished. That on the right side was where their father had

had so mysteriously vanished. It was hung round with tapestry, which was now nearly decayed. The furniture was all Gothic, and greatly damaged; while the elevated narrow casements, placed at a considerable height from the floor, gave this room a most dreary and solitary appearance: in short, it greatly resembled, and had, they supposed, in former times, been used as a place of confinement for some unfortunate prisoner. Leonard examined the boards; and they could plainly perceive those spots of blood which had been before observed by Edward and the physician. In all probability this blood was their father's!—the idea struck each of them. Agnes was greatly shocked and terrified; Leonard conversed with considerable emotion in private with his master for some minutes, while Matilda, unable to bear her own feelings, burst into a flood of tears. After an hysterical fit of weeping, she found herself much better; and, having closed the apartments, they descended to the parlour.

Some hours were again spent by Alfred and Leonard in a private conference above. Both still retained a settled melancholy on their features; while Agnes was more astonished, and Matilda more alarmed than ever. The reason of her brother's secrecy she could by no means discover:—hitherto she had been made acquainted with every circumstance concerning their situation; but Alfred was now silent even on general topics, and only put confidence in his servant. Her pride forbade her to ask questions, yet her curiosity prompted her to the humiliation, as being the only means of gratifying it. Evening approached:—their sup-

per was again a silent meal, and they retired without any conversation having passed.

Agnes was soon in a profound sleep; but Matilda's thoughts on her brother's behaviour robbed her of repose. It was now the last hour of the night, and she strove again to compose herself to rest, when she thought she heard her brother's voice; yet she considered she must be deceived, as both Leonard and he had been in their apartments near two hours. The wind was extremely high; Matilda, however, still listened, and found she was not mistaken.—A listener was an appellation she detested; but yet she thought her present situation took every stigma from the character. She was, however, still irresolute in what manner to act, when a loud word from her brother made her determined to hear more. Having accordingly thrown over her a nightgown, she crept to the door. All was silent again for some time:—but after an interval of many minutes, she heard her brother check Leonard for talking so loud; “Matilda,” said he, “may not yet be asleep.” They then continued so low that she could not even understand one word. After another interval, Leonard answered to a question which Alfred asked him, that “It was not the time.”

“If I die in the attempt,” said Alfred, “I will unravel this mystery:—and if I once—”

Here a violent gust of wind rattled through the chambers, and she was unable to distinguish their discourse, though they still continued talking. At length, however, she heard Leonard say, “I will be very careful, sir:—you may depend on my fidelity.”

“For

"For heaven's sake," continued Alfred, follow it to the utmost:—but at all events do not discover—"

Here again the wind drowned their voices; and shortly after, she heard them retire for the night.

Matilda, chilled with horror and uncertainty, returned to her bed, and fell into a disturbed slumber. In the morning she appeared at breakfast, though her looks plainly told the state of her mind.

"Leonard," said her brother, "is this morning going again to the public market." Matilda was astonished; she knew they were in want of no provision.—Alfred "wished to procure some wine, an article he was certain they were all in need of."

"But surely," answered his sister, "Leonard purchased enough when he was last there."

"True," said he: "but we have had an accident, and broke nearly all the bottles which were full."

Although such an accident was not impossible, yet Matilda greatly doubted the truth of this assertion; and in her brother's manner she thought she could perceive an embarrassment, which showed it was merely an excuse to keep from her the real cause of Leonard's errand.—He, however, set off in a little time, equipped the same as when he before left the abbey, and using the like caution at leaving it.

After his departure they walked on the terrace which extended from the east to the west end of the building. Agnes was some distance

from them, when Matilda considered that this would be a good opportunity to mention to her brother the great alteration she had noticed in him, since his long and secret conference with Leonard. Alfred at first seemed only to laugh at her fears, and wished to persuade her she was mistaken; but she urged the matter so close that he at last confessed Leonard's information that night had given him considerable uneasiness and distress.

"Then," said Matilda with quickness, "let me share in that distress,—which will be far better than to remain in this horrid suspense."

"That is impossible," returned Alfred: "you cannot, must not, be acquainted with the affair."

His vehemence alarmed her.

"Is then the circumstance of so secret a nature, that I, who have hitherto been made a partner in the knowledge of all those misfortunes that have befallen us, must not now know that which your servant is privy to, and which may concern me equally with yourself?"

"Be not offended, Matilda, if I tell you again it is impossible that in this case I should gratify your wish: but be assured every method I take will be for your good and safety; nor must you be surprised at any remarkable behaviour in me at different intervals, or terrify yourself at any uncommon occurrences in this abbey, as our residence here is now more necessary than ever."

"Have you then seen any thing more than common?" said his sister with great emotion.

"With

“ With respect to this too, you must excuse me,” answered Alfred: “ at all events, however, we have one consolation, that those who trust in the Supreme Being need never fear the interruption of deceased persons.”

Agnes at this moment overtook them, and he hurried from his sister with considerable precipitation into the hall. Matilda stood motionless some minutes.

“ I am sure, madam,” said Agnes, “ signor Maserini has been saying something very dreadful; for I watched you all the time, and, though at a distance, could perceive your countenance change several times.” Matilda wished to keep the last equivocal words of her brother from Agnes, as she knew she was, if possible, more timid than herself; but her looks contradicted her speech, and, little used to say untruths, even the questions of the innocent Agnes puzzled and perplexed her. They returned to Alfred in the hall. He was more melancholy than ever, and Matilda was sorry she had spoken to him on the subject.

After some time Leonard returned, and produced plenty of wine, with part of a French newspaper, which he told them he had by chance laid hold of. One of the paragraphs mentioned the death of count D'Ollifont, and that, by the account of the physicians, he was murdered by a wound given him at a masquerade by his relation the chevalier Maserini, who had fled to France; but that strict search was now making after him both in that country and Italy.

“ At all events, then,” said Alfred, we must remain here, till either justice brings my

cause to a proper crisis, or till I am crushed by arbitrary power and matchless villany."

He seemed much affected, yet bore the news with unusual fortitude. Leonard requested to speak to him alone, and they retired to their apartment. Agnes again wondered at these private conferences, and Matilda was yet silent.

In about an hour and a half they returned to the parlour. Leonard still continued gloomy:—but there was a considerable alteration in his master—he was now as full of spirits as he had been before melancholy; but yet they seemed forced, and it appeared more like a madman's mirth, than the regular sensations of joy. He laughed, talked immoderately, but yet often sighed.

Matilda observed him with anxiety and terror, while Agnes and Leonard were silent spectators of his strange behaviour. Supper-time at length arrived; when the little group formed an expressive scene. Alfred at one end of the table, first in an excessive fit of merriment,—then looking round him with horror, hardly able to suppress the rising tear.—His sister was seated next him,—her colour entirely faded through distress, while her fine eyes were fixed on him with a look of misery that well showed the inward workings of her soul.—Agnes wept, and looked up to Matilda for consolation, who was now unable to give it.

The good old Leonard was seated at a little distance from them, surveying each with attention, and often wiping from his aged eye the watery drop of sympathetic tenderness. "Give us more light," said Alfred, "we will make

make a jovial night of it; and set on another bottle of the last wine."

Leonard obeyed; two more candles were lighted, and the bottle placed before him.

"You do not consider," said Matilda, "that it grows late, and we have already had the usual quantity."

"I care not," he answered: "the Tuscan grape revives me."

His sister perceived it had already taken great effect on his spirits. The night now began to grow extremely stormy, and the thunder rolled over the building with considerable noise. The room being very large, the further part from where they sat was entirely dark; but even this space was at intervals illumined by the flashes of lightning which darted through the windows in that part, the shutters being entirely decayed, Matilda and Agnes once more begged him to retire to rest; but he was obstinate,—declared he would not,—and ordered another bottle, having drank the chief part of the former one. In short, he took bumper after bumper for some time, while every moment he became more frantic, and the avidity with which he drank confirmed him to be distracted.—His behaviour also showed him to be intoxicated; and the walls of Grasville Abbey, which had so long remained in silence, now rung again with his exclamations and noise.—Yet his voice was often drowned by the repeated claps of thunder, while the lightning became more and more dreadful. Matilda, Agnes, and Leonard, were all silent spectators of this scene. It was now midnight,

midnight, and they gave up all idea of persuading him to retire to rest.

"Fill your glasses!" he cried: "I am going to give you a noble health."—He rose from his seat, and sighed heavily:—then holding up the sparkling goblet, he exclaimed, "Lady Caroline Albourne!"

A most tremendous clap of thunder!

Each looked with horror: Alfred stood in the same posture as when he uttered the health; nor had he been able even to put his lips to the glass: but, after the noise entirely died away, seemed to be listening with a degree of terror, as if he then heard it.—In a few minutes he recovered himself.

"This is a dreadful night," said he to his sister.

"It is indeed," answered Matilda. "For heaven's sake, Alfred, let us retire to rest; I assure you I can hardly support myself."

"Another health!" he cried, relapsing into his former manner;—"another I must drink:—Leonard, replenish the goblet."

"You forget, sir, that it is now full."

"True, true," he cried, "I had forgot—Here then," said he, laughing, "is to the old ghost that inhabits this abbey."

A violent crash!

All started from their seats.—Agnes shrieked, —Matilda looked wild.—Leonard ran to their assistance; while Alfred was still unable to put the goblet to his mouth, but stood half stupefied with wine, horror, and astonishment. The noise seemed to come from an apartment which opened by a pair of folding doors into the

the dark part of the room where they were now standing.

Before any one could speak, a violent clap of thunder followed, and several flashes of lightning. The first person who broke silence, was Leonard. "Be not frightened," said he to Matilda and Agnes: but his tongue faltered, and showed he was equally terrified with themselves.

"This is a terrible night," continued Leonard; "but I will protect you to the last drop of my blood."

"And so will I," cried Alfred, staggering from his seat: "I will protect you too."

"Talk not of protecting us, Alfred," answered Matilda: "for if the spirit of our father at this time walks in these apartments, it is but to reproach you for your present disgraceful situation.—Come, Agnes! we will go to bed."

"Oh! no indeed, mademoiselle! I dare not," said Agnes: "I cannot move."

Matilda's reproach seemed to have some effect on her brother. "My father!" he exclaimed.

A deep groan!

"Hark! hark! he answers me: it is from that room: I'll see him, if I die."

"Not for worlds," said Leonard, holding him. "There may be treachery in this business, sir: pray stay where you are."

Another groan!

"Hark again!" he exclaimed, "I will go; by heavens, I will be satisfied." At that moment he disengaged himself from Leonard, who catching up a sword, followed him.

They

They both rushed to the dark part of the room. Alfred was first:—he pushed open the folding doors. An amazing flash of lightning illuminated the apartment they entered. Alfred, in a tone of horror, exclaimed, "There!"

The object caught Leonard's eye. "In the name of the Holy Virgin," said the old man, "who art thou?"

"'Tis gone, 'tis vanished," answered Alfred. He was right: there was nothing now to be seen. They returned to the parlour; Matilda and Agnes, who had been entirely forgotten by them, were lying on the couch, nearly senseless; but the former had heard the words that passed, distinctly. Alfred had in a great degree regained his reason. Matilda and Agnes after some little time recovered, and, with assistance, arrived at their chamber: here they parted for the night; and thus ended an adventure which seemed in a great measure to confirm all the terrific reports concerning Grasville Abbey.

CHAP.

CHAP. XXVII.

THE HERMIT.

*“Beneath a mountain’s brow, the most remote
 And inaccessible by shepherds trod,
 In a deep cave, dug by no mortal hand,
 A hermit liv’d—a melancholy man,
 Who was the wonder of our wandering swains.
 Austere and lonely, cruel to himself,
 Did they report him; the cold earth his bed;
 Water his drink: his food the shepherds’ alms.
 I went to see him, and my heart was touch’d
 With reverence and with pity. Mild he spake,
 And, entering on discourse, such stories told,
 As made me oft revisit his sad cell.”*

HOME.

WHILE in the midst of business, or employment, we often suppose, on account of many disagreeable circumstances that are apt to impede our passage through life, that we could with pleasure relinquish all commerce with mankind, and live after the manner of a misanthrope, totally secluded from our fellow-creatures.—However these ideas may intrude at certain intervals, yet it is improbable they should continue: when once brought to the trial,

trial, we should, like the inhabitants of Grafville Abbey, languish after society, though our situation might totally preclude such a wish from being gratified.

The agitation of Matilda's spirits, and her loss of rest the few preceding nights, combined to throw her into a profound slumber; and though she was still harassed with uncomfortable and terrific dreams, yet she enjoyed some repose; but the little benefit she received from it was entirely destroyed when she awoke in the morning, by a recollection of the late strange and uncommon circumstances. Her brother's behaviour was as incomprehensible as the violent crash and dismal groans which had been heard in the apartment adjoining the parlour. There was also another mystery to be explained, that is, what the appearance was which had drawn from Alfred and his servant those exclamations of horror that she had heard. This was a point of curiosity, with respect to which she in particular wished to be satisfied; but at all events she resolved to request no further communication from her brother. Leonard, therefore, was the only person she could question on the subject; and to him she determined to apply at a proper opportunity.

At a very late hour they assembled to breakfast. Alfred seemed buried in melancholy reflections, but made an apology for his late frantic behaviour.

Matilda looked extremely ill:—Agnes seemed by no means recovered from her terror; while Leonard's countenance was still sorrowful and gloomy.

gloomy. Matilda understood, at the latter part of the morning, that Leonard was again going to the public market; but it caused no surprise, as they were in want of provision. He accordingly, in a little time, set off for the purpose of procuring some.

Alfred, after his departure, retired to his chamber, and took pen, ink, and paper with him. Agnes cooked the dinner, and Matilda took up a book. The former now began to converse on the events of the night before. "It does not signify, mademoiselle," continued Agnes, in a harangue of some length; "but there is something very unaccountable in this abbey.—I am sure I shall now be afraid even to remain in this parlour by myself. The holy Virgin protect us!—but I should not wonder if we were all to be carried away one of these days by the hobgoblins that haunt the place."

"Rather one of these nights," answered Matilda, willing to put off the discourse with a jest.

"Indeed, mademoiselle, but father Dunstan used to say such things have been seen, even when the sun shined."

Matilda could not help laughing; but Agnes looked more serious, and declared father Dunstan was a man who had often conversed with them, and knew their tricks as well as they did themselves.

"For heaven's sake, Agnes," replied Matilda, "do not encourage these silly ideas, or you will make your life a scene of uncomfortable apprehension and terror."

"It

“ It is a misfortune, mademoiselle; and you must pity instead of blaming me. Yet,” continued Agnes, with an arch look, “ I rather think you only talk in this indifferent manner to me, with the kind intent of dispelling my fears: I thank you; but you must give me leave to say, I think your thoughts are far different from your words.

“ This remark was just, and Matilda’s hesitating manner and blush confirmed Agnes that she was right. After some time, Alfred returned from his chamber. He spoke but little, and seemed to wait with a degree of impatience for Leonard’s return. He, however, stopped longer than usual; and they had nearly finished their dinner when he entered. He brought with him a good stock of provisions; but the information he received was by no means agreeable. The people, he said, talked much of the death of the count d’Ollifont, and the large reward that was offered for the chevalier Maferini, his relation; “ and though the general voice is much in favour of you, sir,” continued Leonard,” “ yet we must not trust to that, and forget the temptation the money will excite;”—an observation which they all agreed was very just. In a short time he requested a private conference with his master: and they returned to the parlour in about an hour.

Alfred was then more composed than he had been for some time, and Leonard rather more chearful. After supper the latter informed them that he had heard, among other things concerning the abbey, that an old hermit resided in a cave
near

near it, which had been his habitation for a number of years.

"I wonder," said Alfred, "if it would be possible to pay him a visit without being observed by any other person."

"Nothing more easy, sir," answered Leonard. "His cave is at the bottom of a long walk of cypresses, on the west side of this building. The situation is so retired, and withal so near the abbey, that it is never intruded on by any of the villagers."

"I should wish much to see him," said Alfred: "he may give me information of considerable importance."

"It is not at all unlikely, sir; for people say he knows more about the story of Grasville Abbey than any one in this part: though he is always silent on the subject."

"To-morrow, then, I will visit him," answered Alfred, "first as an indifferent person: but, if I find him a man of piety, and inclined to prove my friend, I will make him acquainted with the whole state of my affairs."

"But I hope you will first," said Matilda, "be perfectly satisfied he deserves your confidence."

"That you may depend on; but I can see no objection to you and Agnes being of the party; and you will then, Matilda, be able to judge of my conduct."

Matilda was pleased with the proposal, and said she was certain the air would be of service to her. In short, this scheme seemed to meet with the approbation of all; and the evening

evening was spent with more sociality than they had enjoyed since the second night of their residence in the abbey.

At an early hour they retired to rest ; and as Agnes and Matilda left the parlour, each gave a side look at the folding-doors on the further end, and trembled as they advanced to their chambers.

Matilda rested better than she had for some weeks, and rose with more than common spirits. She contrived to get down stairs before her brother, purposely to obtain an opportunity of speaking to Leonard alone. According to her wishes, he was in the parlour setting the breakfast-table, while Agnes was preparing it in the hall.—She immediately opened the subject, and begged him to disclose to her those circumstances which had occasioned such mysterious behaviour."

Leonard looked chagrined. "Alas ! *mademoiselle*," he answered, "it is impossible :—excuse me,—but I cannot satisfy you."

Matilda was displeased.

"It cuts me to the heart," continued he, "it does indeed, *mademoiselle*, to refuse your request : but I am bound by a sacred tie."

"I would not have you break it, then," replied Matilda : "yet, though you are much older than I, Leonard, I must caution you not to be too precipitate in entering into every scheme my brother proposes to you. He is rash ; nor do I, from his behaviour the night before last, think his senses are in a right state at certain times."

"Heaven

"Heaven forbid they should be deranged," answered this faithful servant: "for then I am sure,——" here he stopped short, and was silent.

Matilda considered it as cruel to attempt to draw from him that which he had solemnly promised to keep secret; and turned the discourse to the circumstance of his master's entering the apartment with him; from whence they heard the groans. She asked him to explain what he had seen to occasion those exclamations which she had heard uttered with great emotion. Leonard seemed greatly agitated and surprised: he had no idea how she could have heard those words, when both she and Agnes were to all appearance senseless at the time.

Matilda repeated the question. He was going to answer, but hesitated. She begged him not to keep her in suspense. He again began to speak, when Alfred entered the room.

Matilda was vexed and disappointed;—Leonard seemed happy at the intrusion, and Alfred looked surprised to see her up so early. He, however, cast a significant look at Leonard; which showed he could partly discover the purport of their conversation. Agnes brought in the breakfast, and the discourse became general. It was resolved they should walk to the hermit in the fore part of the morning,—that they should tell him they resided near, and that curiosity brought them to his retreat.

Being all equipped for the journey, they set off, walked round the west side of the abbey,
and

and from thence proceeded through a quantity of thick foliage, to the grove of cypress, which, as they supposed, led to the cave. After some time they came to a spot entirely furrounded with trees; and here they observed an opening to a cavity which seemed to be formed out of a mountain that rose a considerable height above it. They stood some moments considering whether they should enter: but curiosity overcame their scruples, and they stepped softly forward. After having gone a few yards, they found the passage wound to the left, and could see at some distance a lamp which gave but a dim light, and seemed to hang down from the roof. Agnes and Matilda again stopped; but Alfred laughed at their fears, and they continued to walk in silence. As they came nearer, the passage widened, and they could just perceive a table covered with cloth, on which lay a human scull and bones, with a large book and hour-glass. Matilda trembled, and Agnes involuntarily turned round. Alfred, however, by a motion, begged them to be silent. They listened, and heard the voice of a person praying.

Their fears were now in some measure dispelled; and they walked a little further, when a reverend form caught their eye, in a long gown, which was fastened round him by a belt: he knelt, with his back to them, before a crucifix. Struck with a sacred awe, they stood in silent admiration, and listened to the hermit's prayer.

"Father of mercy," he exclaimed, "hear the petition of thy servant!—cleanse him of those
those

those sins and wickednesses he has been guilty of in the sight of thee, and pour into his breast that balm of comfort and consolation thou only canst give. Strengthen him with thy grace; and, though immured in this recess, grant him power, O Lord! while on earth, to be of service to his fellow-creatures; that by good example and advice he may turn the hearts of the unrighteous to a sense of thy goodness and mercy."

Here a flood of tears, which started from his aged eyes, prevented him from proceeding: he turned from the crucifix before him, and at that moment lifting up his head, beheld the intruders on his privacy. He gazed at Alfred, uttered a faint groan, and fell senseless on the ground. Alarmed at the emotion they had caused, each ran to his assistance, and strove to recover him from so alarming an insensibility. Their efforts, however, for some time proved ineffectual; but he at last showed some signs of returning life.

"Forgive us, father," said Alfred: "we come not with an intent to alarm you:—the fame of your pious character raised in us a desire to see so venerable a person. But be assured, if we had known the effects of our entering in so sudden a manner would have occasioned, our wishes should have remained ungratified."

The hermit still kept his eyes fixed with a wild look, and was silent.

"Indeed, father," said Matilda, "we regret that you have suffered so much on our account."

"Ah!

“ Ah ! and are you there ? ” exclaimed he :
“ I think I know you both . ”

Each turned aside :—a thought struck them that the hermit might have some knowledge of them ; and they were in their turn greatly alarmed. Their fears, however, soon vanished, when in a more composed manner he asked who they were.

“ We live not far distant , ” returned Alfred, “ and, as I before told you, were tempted by the reports of your piety and goodness, to pay you a visit . ”

“ You are very young , ” answered the hermit, “ to covet the company of so old a man. —I have been extremely ill, and, at present, am but faint : pray all be seated. —Forgive me, if I do not observe the laws of hospitality, as I am so little used to company, and am not quite recovered from my indisposition . ”

They refused his offer, with thanks for his kindness, and promised to return at the same hour the next day. —“ You will not, I suppose, father , ” said Alfred, “ have any other visitors . ”

“ None, my son , ” replied the hermit : “ alas ! I seldom see a soul in this retired spot. The dread of passing yonder abbey totally precludes me from strangers —I am, however, glad that there are some, whom report has not so far intimidated with idle fears . ”

“ Adieu, father ! ” said they, as they came forth to the entrance.

“ Adieu, my children ! ” answered he : “ the Holy Lady guide you ! ”

Here

Here they parted.—Father Peter (for such was the hermit's name) returned to his cell, and his visitors hurried to the abbey as soon as possible.

Their conversation at dinner was chiefly on their new acquaintance. None could account for the effect which their presence had on him, or the particular emotion he showed when by chance he turned his eyes towards Alfred. There was something mysterious in these circumstances, which made them rather dubious of performing their promised visit the next morning. They, however, at last resolved to risque it, and trust to the external appearance of this man, in which were combined benevolence, humanity, and religion. Matilda, also, particularly noticed in his prayer the mention of the sins and wickednesses he had been guilty of. This again raised their suspicions; but Alfred observed, that to humble ourselves before the Supreme Deity, is a duty incumbent on every christian; “and,” continued he, “such was, no doubt, the idea of father Peter.”

Here the discourse dropped, and Alfred and Leonard, after dinner, had another private conference.

Matilda declared she found herself much better for the walk. This evening was again spent with some degree of comfort, and they retired to their chambers rather at a late hour.—Agnes was soon undressed; but Matilda seated herself in the seat of one of the gothic windows, and viewed, with a mixture of pleasure and awe, the gloomy prospect before

her. The clouds were low and heavy: yet it was moon-light; and the dark shadows of the surrounding trees, which terminated the prospect, spread over that space which remained uncovered in the court.

In an angle she could just observe the mouldering decayed side of the west tower, and the two where casements were to be perceived.—The wind was high and tempestuous, and seemed to threaten an approaching storm.

Matilda's spirits were uncommonly low;—she wept abundantly. “Alas!” thought she, “could I have known the sorrows, the sufferings I was to have experienced, gladly would I have welcomed death, and sunk into an early grave, without even a wish to survive.—But I was then happy,—cherished by a tender parent—surrounded with friends—beloved by all,—and knew not the duplicity of mankind, or the misfortunes human nature is subject to. Merciful Father, exclaimed she with fervency, “forgive, my murmuring at thy will:—strengthen me to support those scenes of adversity I am destined to go through; and give me fortitude enough to bear that fate it is ordained I should experience.”

She found herself more composed, yet did not seem inclined to sleep, but continued watching the different changes of the sky. Her eyes wandered over the wild scene of foliage which was in a continual motion by the impulse of the wind. She thought it lightened twice, and was turning from the window, when her eye caught the casement in the west tower, and a strong glare of light at that moment darted from

from within it. Matilda could not move. She was motionless with surprise and horror but still kept looking at the object, which continued illumined. In about three minutes a hand seemed to wave from one side. At that moment the light vanished, and all was again in perfect darkness. Matilda, scarcely able to support herself, staggered to the bed,—sunk on it,—closed her eyes through fear,—and, after a considerable time, fell into a slumber.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



C.115.aa.5.